

**At the crossroads of the identity (re)construction process: an  
analysis of 'fateful moments' in the lives of Coloured students  
within an equity development programme at UCT**

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## ABSTRACT

Sociology has made valuable contributions in the area of identity theory. Recent research into the identity transformation process has seen much emphasis being placed on developing specific conceptual tools to unpack the variable nature of these transformations. These conceptual tools have been extremely efficient. Their focus, however, has tended to be either too macro-social or micro-social at times. As a result, not enough attention has been given to developing existing conceptual tools that can address individual identity transformations at both the macro and micro levels. This study attempts to address this need. What is illustrated here is the extent to which the application of a particular conceptual tool can be enriched by selectively drawing on other identity concepts so as to offer a fuller and more context-laden understanding of the identity transformation process. In this study I use Anthony Giddens' (1991) notion of 'fateful moments' as an anchor concept. Giddens uses this concept to unpack the existential basis of identity transformations. I draw on additional concepts from cognitive, lifespan and phenomenological approaches to identity and show how these can be used conjunctively to enhance the efficiency of the 'fateful moment' concept for exploring the existential dimension of identity transformations. I demonstrate the use of this 'fateful moment' concept by employing it to examine the identity transformations undergone by three Coloured students participating in an equity development programme at the University of Cape Town (a historically White institution). I show how their location within an equity development programme allows them to engage in a particular type of reflexivity, through which they strive to create meaningful continuity in their lives. My focus was to gain insight into these students' significant relationships with others and to show how these relationships impacted on the ways in which they experienced their sense of location in the world. As a result, the issue of 'self' and the desire on the part of the research participants to locate an 'authentic self' became an important driver in the research process. What is illustrated, therefore, is how an existential focus is able to offer new perspectives on Coloured identity, especially in relation to its inclusion under the racial category of 'Black' in post-apartheid SA.

This thesis adopts a qualitative case study approach. The experiences of three Coloured UCT students are presented as three individual case studies. I examine their home, school and university contexts to develop particular biographical narratives for each of them, so as to better locate the circumstances under which their 'fateful moments' occur and the impact thereof on

their sense of self. An in-depth qualitative analysis of each of these students' identity transformation experiences was conducted, which revealed new ways in which to think about, use and define the 'fateful moment' concept. My data included reflective essays, semi-structured interviews and observational field notes. I used my initial analysis of the reflective essays and observation notes as a means to develop some of the more open-ended interview questions. The interviews therefore served as a means of triangulating the data. I drew on a combination of content analysis and constructivist grounded theory for analysing the data.

I established that these students' continued classification as Coloured in their everyday social interactions, impacted negatively on their perceptions of self. The inclusion of *Coloured* in the overarching descriptive category of Black, surfaced as a particular source of contention, resentment and guilt for the Coloured students represented here. These students were all searching for a way of expressing an authentic sense of self that was unencumbered by the restrictive and limited possibilities that was bound up in traditional constructions of Coloured identity in SA.

What becomes apparent is that the 'fateful moment' concept, when used in conjunction with other selected theoretical perspectives, offers a much more nuanced understanding of the identity transformation process. As such, the strategic use of 'fateful moments' as illustrated in its application to Coloured identity in this thesis, allows us to get a much better understanding of how race *feels*, thereby adding value to the way in which sociological theory constructs meaning in the world. The conceptual framework for unpacking identity transformation developed here, makes available a particular sociological lens for assessing and measuring the transformational impact of equity development programmes at institutions of higher education. It also allows a more critical stance to be developed towards the tendency to homogenise the Black South African student experience. Doing so allows institutions the space to reflect more deeply on how to strategise around issues of social justice, equity and transformation.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction to the Study

In this chapter I offer an overview of the broad socio-political context in which this study is conducted. I present a brief outline of the rationale, the research questions, methodology and core theoretical perspectives informing this research. I point to how the achievement of democracy in South Africa (SA) has created a tension between expressions of individuality, group solidarity and social transformation agendas within the University of Cape Town (UCT), a historically White university setting. I signal the extent to which Coloured<sup>1</sup> identity in the Western Cape has been a particular source of contention and concern with respect to how its inclusion and expression as a 'Black' identity is perceived. At a more micro level, I locate a group of Coloured students, all of whom are participating in an equity development programme at UCT alongside Black African and South African Indian students. I show how their location in this equity programme acts as a stimulus for raising serious questions about their perceptions of self and their sense of belonging in the new democratic setting. In so doing, I highlight the contentious and fragile nature of Coloured identity in a post-apartheid university setting. I unpack all of the above against the backdrop of Giddens' (1991) concept of a 'fateful moment', which represents the core focus of concern in the identity construction process underlining this thesis. 'Fateful moments' are understood here as an occurrence that radically impacts an individual's sense of self, producing intense levels of anxiety that renders a personal state of ontological insecurity. The consequences are such that the individual undergoes a process of identity transformation so as to reclaim a sense of continuity in his or her life. I provide a brief

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<sup>1</sup> To appreciate fully the impact of apartheid ideology on the reconstructions of post-apartheid identities in South Africa, I will be using the apartheid imposed racial classification labels of White, African, Coloured and Indian in this thesis. The term 'African' signals indigenous Black African groupings. 'Indian' refers to people with Indian and African-Indian descent while 'White' refers to those with a European heritage. 'Coloureds' are popularly regarded as being of mixed race. The term 'Coloured' refers to a broad and culturally diverse social group descendent from Cape slaves, indigenous Khoisan and European settlers. In the post-apartheid setting, the term 'Black' is used inclusively to signal African, Coloured and Indian people together. Where appropriate, I use the term 'Black' in a similar way in this study. I follow Adhikari (2005:xv) in capitalising the 'C' in 'Coloured' so as to emphasise the extent of the changes and transformation that this identity is still undergoing after nearly twenty years of democratic rule in South Africa. The same argument can be made for the other racial categories and in order to create uniformity, I have capitalised the first letter of these terms as well. Again following Adhikari (2005:xv) I will use the term Coloured for those who classify themselves as such, while resorting to place the term in single quotation marks in cases where this label is rejected by those who would generally fall under this category.

motivation as to why Coloured identity is such an attractive site for the application of this concept and how such analysis is able to contribute to new knowledge about identity construction in SA. I conclude with an overview of the chapters making up this study, together with an indication of how each chapter is organised to support the overall structure of the thesis.

## Reflecting on being Coloured

I'm just confused about – there's a schism, like schizophrenia about it because we don't know how to feel about it because you find yourself then with being without a name and then how do you come up with a name? It's an artificial process – you know, people didn't sit up and name themselves in the face of an oppressive name. And then it just becomes too tricky how to decide who is part of that group, who is not. So – because that debate is so tricky, um, you know, we keep 'Coloured' because it's impossible to be without a name.  
(Issachar,<sup>2</sup> UCT MMUF student)

Well, oh, it's just like this one time just out of the blue we were chatting and it was before a lecture and then one of my Black friends goes up to me, she like turns to me and like 'So what are you, Margaret? What are you?'... I don't know what to answer because I know the answer that she's expecting, which will be 'Coloured'... – so I was like 'I'm so-called 'Coloured' but I'm Black because I think we are all Black'.  
(Margaret, UCT MMUF student)

So I think it was – and it must have been within the first two days at Emory because we got on so well with Emory students and they just started asking us questions. And then I think Selwyn's<sup>3</sup> point of saying... – oh, as a 'Coloured' person, he doesn't see himself as actually a 'Coloured' person, he sees himself as a Black African. And I said 'Don't call me 'Black', please' – and that stems from what I said earlier because I didn't see myself as 'Black'... pure 'Black' ancestry – that's what 'Black' meant to me. And I thought I didn't have that, I've actually got more European ancestry... I said I am a Cape Coloured person... 'proudly Coloured'.  
(Glenn, UCT MMUF student)

The above extracts are from three Coloured students at UCT. These students present very different perspectives on how their classification as Coloureds who live on the Cape Flats,<sup>4</sup> has positioned them in a post-apartheid South African higher education setting. Each extract offers a glimpse into the complexities of having to lay claim, refute, or recontextualise the meanings associated with Coloured identity. These identity negotiations take place within a shifting South African educational landscape that is reacting to the introduction of new possibilities and opportunities (as well as the challenges) accompanying the process of globalisation.

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<sup>2</sup> To protect their anonymity, I have allowed the research participants to choose their own pseudonyms.

<sup>3</sup> Selwyn (not his real name) is also a UCT MMUF student.

<sup>4</sup> Historically, the Cape Flats refers to a large, flat, low-lying area of land lying outside of the Cape Town City centre. In the 1950's the apartheid government enforced its Group Areas Act legislation to systematically evict Black groups from urban areas (such as District Six and Newlands) located in and around the city centre. Black evictees were relocated to the Cape Flats. Apartheid legislature ensured that Indians, Coloureds and Africans occupied separate locations on the Cape Flats, so as to enforce division amongst Black groups even further. For more insights into the forced removals in Cape Town, see contributions to Field's (2001) edited volume.

## Establishing the context

### *Identifying the problem*

I came to know Issachar, Margaret and Glenn, through my position as a coordinator of the Mellon-Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) Programme at UCT. MMUF is an equity development programme that targets high achieving and socially responsible Black students. Each of the above students had been awarded a two-year scholarship through this programme, an achievement they shared with other Black students who were also recipients of the same award. Through these students' joint participation in the programme, it became clear that buzz words such as 'equity', 'disadvantage', 'transformation', as well as the concept of 'Black identity' within the South African context, had very different meanings for these students. What became apparent were the various ways in which all of these students were grappling with their own sense of belonging and investment in the programme, and how their experiences related to those expressed by their peers. Interactions in the programme seemed to spark a very real and growing need amongst individual students to find ways in which to validate and legitimate their presence in both the MMUF and the broader UCT setting.

### *Motivation*

Over a number of years of coordinating the MMUF Programme, I found that issues of identity and belonging were being articulated most strongly by Coloured MMUF students. I observed how their initial displays of vulnerability and hesitancy in the ways in which they defined themselves took on new, assertive and self-assured dimensions over their two-year stay in the programme. Given my own location as a Coloured Capetonian and lecturer at UCT, I became extremely interested in wanting to learn more about how Coloured students experience UCT. I wished to explore the extent to which their classification as both Coloured and Black, impacts such experiences, especially in relation to the ways in which they choose to self-identify, in racial terms, in the new democratic SA. The equity development space at UCT, which brings together a diverse group of Black students from various schooling, religious, class and cultural backgrounds, presented me with the opportunity to do just that.

### *Moving towards equity at UCT: The MMUF Programme*

The establishing of the extremely selective American-based MMUF Programme at UCT is a direct result of the globalising impact on the higher education spectrum. MMUF forms part of UCT's transformation and equity development initiatives aimed at increasing the number of Black

postgraduate students within the institution. The Coloured students presented here all share the status of being recipients of this prestigious MMUF award and it is within the confines of this dynamic MMUF space that the three opening extracts at the beginning of this chapter are located. MMUF at UCT is a highly successful equity development initiative, in that it makes an effective and valuable contribution towards not only increasing the number of Black postgraduates in SA, but also in ensuring that they develop an awareness of their own status as role models and agents of change and transformation in the higher education sector. The MMUF programme's mission to transform the academy places considerable pressure on MMUF students (both in SA and the United States of America [USA]) to identify and confront a range of disparities and inequities within their respective institutions. It is in the process of carrying out the MMUF mission that many South African MMUF students often find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to reflect quite critically on their own lives and the manner in which their classifications as African, Coloured and Indian situate them in local and international contexts. Issachar, Margaret and Glenn's confronting of their status as Coloured MMUF students certainly has thrown up a range of concerns which has forced them to re-examine core aspects of their identities in the post-apartheid setting. The ways in which these students' self-identify, and the extent to which such perceptions of self are challenged and come unhinged, is therefore a prime concern in this thesis

### *The discomfort of equity: MMUF as a site of conflict and growth*

The MMUF initiative has, undoubtedly, had a positive impact on attracting and maintaining Black students at UCT. At the same time, it has also exposed the extent to which the category of race continues to be a stumbling block to achieving and realising an identity that Black South African students feel comfortable with.<sup>5</sup> Coloured South African MMUF students, in particular, struggle with how to internalise, develop and express a sense of self-identity that they regard as legitimate, and which feels to be a trustworthy part of the broader nation-building project. The opening extracts from Issachar, Margaret and Glenn, whose struggles with self-identity and belonging are unpacked in this thesis, illustrate the aforementioned challenges surrounding expressions of Colouredness. What stands out in these extracts are the intense feelings of discomfort, confusion and even embarrassment at being classified and recognised by others as being 'Coloured' in the post-apartheid era. On the other end of the spectrum there is even a

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<sup>5</sup> See Nomdo (2006) for more insights into how Black African MMUF students at UCT grapple with defining their identity status. The issue of Black students increasingly feeling 'an acute sense of alienation' at UCT was recently also raised by UCT Fine Arts lecturer Dr Siona O'Connell, as part of her address at the *Mail & Guardian's* Literary Festival held at the end of August, 2014.

detectable element of elitism in *wanting to be* identified exclusively as Coloured, without the associations of being Black and African, since these are viewed as being subordinate to Colouredness. Historically, this view of Coloured identity stems from the apartheid government's racial policy of bestowing a higher ranking status on Coloureds which allowed them access to more privileges than their Black African counterparts. This disparity between Black groupings is symptomatic of the tenuous nature of the relationship that traditionally existed between many Africans and Coloureds on the Cape Flats, the likes of which still persist today.<sup>6</sup>

Located at the foot of Table Mountain's Devil's Peak, UCT overlooks the Cape Flats. This view symbolises a particular type of White historical dominance and privilege, and it is in this sense that the journey 'up the hill' by historically disadvantaged communities comes to represent a new struggle for UCT. It is a struggle in which UCT as an institution, together with those whom it now strives to serve, must find a way of coming to terms with and reconciling the harsh realities of apartheid's legacy. The location of the MMUF Programme at UCT is therefore quite significant: it affords Black students with a platform for grappling with their own sense of identity and location within an equity development space in which race is taken seriously. It also gives these students the opportunity to develop some basis for assessing the relationship between the micro MMUF structure and the larger institutional context in which it is framed. The ability of the MMUF space to equip and empower MMUF students with the necessary tools for coping and succeeding in a setting such as UCT, will therefore also receive attention in this study.

## The vexed issue of Coloured identity

### *Identifying sites of conflict*

The broad location of the Western Cape as a traditional stronghold of Coloured socio-political expression<sup>7</sup> and Black African marginalisation, together with the location of UCT as an elite historically White institution wanting to affect positive social change, act as important sites of reference for this study.

This thesis casts a special light on the plight of three Coloured students, Issachar, Margaret and Glenn, and seeks to understand how their classification as a disadvantaged South African

<sup>6</sup> For more insights into the tensions between Black Africans and Coloureds in the Western Cape, see James, Caliguire and Cullinan's (1996) edited volume; Erasmus's (2001) edited volume; Adhikari (2005) and also the introduction to his (2009) edited volume.

<sup>7</sup> South Africa's first democratic elections saw the Coloured majority in the Western Cape voting in favour of their previous oppressors, the National Party. The ANC's inability to win over the Coloured vote continues to be a source of much controversy.



minority measures up to their perceptions of self. I explore here how these students' classification as 'Coloured' impacts the nature of their social interactions at a historically White institution like UCT, and how such interactions, in turn, affect how they feel about their location and purpose in the world. Since the Western Cape has the largest concentration of Coloureds<sup>8</sup> in SA, it was marked by the apartheid regime as the central site for housing the only 'Coloured' designated university, namely, the University of the Western Cape (UWC), located on the Cape Flats. Thus, both UWC and UCT signal particular historical locations in the development of higher education in SA. The Coloured students presented in this thesis have lived in Cape Town all of their lives and have made a conscious choice to attend UCT. This is important to note, since despite Coloureds making up the majority of the population in the Western Cape, they only represent a small minority at UCT. Currently, Coloureds represent about 15% of the UCT student body, while White, Black African and Indian<sup>9</sup> students (all South Africans) represent 37%, 21% and 7% respectively, with international students making up the balance (Phakathi 2013). Given its elite status in SA's higher education setting, many Coloureds from the Cape Flats enter UCT with a sense of apprehension and with certain expectations about themselves and the institution. It is the points at which these expectations meet with those of the institution, that are of interest to me.

### *Addressing 'disadvantage' and 'belonging' at UCT: a contradiction in terms*

UCT has made huge strides in establishing itself as one of the leading research institutions in Africa and enjoys international recognition (Daily News 2014). The institution places special focus on creating an inclusive, non-racial, diverse and supportive environment, with a special commitment to increase access to disadvantaged communities in the Western Cape ([www.uct.ac.za/about/transformation](http://www.uct.ac.za/about/transformation)). The road to achieving these transformation goals continues to be a complex one, given the vast range of disparities between rural, township and urban schooling sectors, in which Black pupils remain the most disadvantaged grouping. UCT therefore has to deal with the variable nature of the category of 'disadvantage' in quite a sophisticated way in its attempts at widening access to disadvantaged communities. Access alone is not enough. Additional requirements include the necessary support structures to help disadvantaged groups succeed in this highly diverse and competitive environment. In general, the local Coloured and Black African students continue to be a minority in this setting and

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<sup>8</sup> More than two-thirds of the South African Coloured population live in the Western Cape; more than 40% in and around Cape Town.

<sup>9</sup> The South African Indian population live mostly in the province of Kwazulu-Natal, with only a small minority living in Cape Town.

struggle with the demands made upon them, both academically and socially. In addition, Black students entering historically White university settings find themselves confronted with an institutional culture that often explicitly 'conveys powerful messages of who the institution is for' (Jansen 2004:2). Negotiating a sense of belonging is therefore not an easy task, especially since 'Academic culture is not uniformly accessed or experienced' (Read et al. 2003:261).

It is within this broad institutional context that I locate the three Coloured students whose senses of identity I focus on in this thesis. It is their struggles with trying to carve out a personal sense of identity that they can relate to, feel comfortable with and which can provide them with a true sense of belonging in a post-apartheid higher education context that I present here. Whilst there have certainly been many positive changes made in the higher education sector since SA's achievement of democracy, there is also awareness that amidst these positive structural and policy changes, much still needs to be done at an institutional culture context to address feelings of marginalisation experienced by historically disadvantaged student communities.

## **Making informed research choices: The attraction to Coloured identity for creating new theoretical insights**

### *Establishing a context for unpacking race and identity in SA*

The post-apartheid era has seen a shift from the focus on Black unity during the liberation struggle to the current focus on difference and individuality, in which tensions between race and class dominate. These tensions underline much of the problems that have been experienced in the quest for a national identity, especially in the Western Cape, where the democratically elected African National Congress (ANC) government enjoys less support in Coloured communities.<sup>10</sup> There is therefore a serious need for reconceptualising racialised identities in SA, so that its impact on the question of national unity can be taken seriously. This thesis is, in part, a response to the plea made by Jara (2006:2), who in his analysis of the tensions between the Western Cape and the national unity project, called for, amongst other things, a more 'rigorous theoretical conceptualisation of the dynamics of race' in a post-apartheid SA.

The decision to focus on Coloured identity in this thesis is not random. Coloured people enjoyed a relatively privileged position during the apartheid era. This has placed them in a rather precarious position in the new democratic setting. This makes it an extremely viable site for

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<sup>10</sup> While the ANC has a large support base in the other provinces, it has been unsuccessful in securing leadership in the Western Cape, which falls under the control of the Democratic Alliance (DA), led by Helen Zille.

investigating issues of identity transformation in the post-apartheid era. It also presents the opportunity for assessing the suitability of the conceptual tools employed and for thinking about different ways in which these tools can be used to signal new areas of enquiry with respect to issues of identity. The attraction to the question of Coloured identity is boosted further by my desire to develop more critical insight into my own social orientation as a Coloured educator and activist, so as to be more informed and equipped to deal with the structuring of my own post-apartheid identity. Being able to work with and have prolonged access to Coloured students who were grappling with their own identities in an equity development programme at UCT, also allowed me to structure my research ideas in a more informed way. By paying attention to instances of personal conflict in the lives of the Coloured research participants, especially within the privileged UCT setting, I hope to shed much needed light on some of the intricacies underlining the need amongst Coloured students to transform the ways in which they locate themselves in the world. Such insights will help address the urgent need for assessing the status of Coloured identity within UCT and provide much needed insights into the debates around national unity. The question of Coloured identity and the diverse ways in which those classified as Coloured interpret, internalise, articulate and experience being Coloured in their everyday interactions with other South Africans, offers us the unique opportunity to enrich our understanding of this sector of the South African community.

### *Identifying the core research focus*

This thesis is not primarily about Coloured identity per se. Specifically, it is about how a particular theoretical tool, namely the concept of a 'fateful moment', can be used in new ways to inform sociological debates around the issue of identity transformations. At a more in-depth and analytical level, the core question being asked here is the extent to which 'fateful moment' episodes impact the perceptions of self amongst Coloured students attending UCT. The thrust of this study is therefore aimed at showing the extent to which a core theoretical concept can be used in different and innovative ways to increase our understanding of the personal circumstances under which individuals reconstruct and mobilise perceptions of self. This thesis adds to the conceptual framework developed by Giddens (1991) for unpacking the identity construction process in the late modern era. I focus on the existential dimension of Giddens' (1991) concept of 'fateful moment', and through its application to Coloured identity I show how new meaning and direction can be gained from its use, thereby boosting its validity and applicability as a conceptual tool in the identity construction debates. Therefore, by foregrounding how certain core experiences (fateful moments) have transformed the ways in

which Issachar, Margaret and Glenn view and position themselves in the world, I aim to show how important it is to have an existential basis for expanding the conceptual frameworks that inform the meanings associated with Black identity in a post-apartheid setting.

### *Identifying a gap in the literature*

The existential dimension of the identity construction process put forward in this thesis, constitutes a valuable addition to the existing literature on Coloured identity. This literature, to a large extent, has tended to focus on the historical origins, socio-political locations, inter-group relations, cultural dynamics, marginality, complicity, displacement and to a lesser extent, trauma, associated with Coloured identity (Adhikari 2005, 2009; Erasmus 2001; Field 2001; Goldin 1987; Trotter 2009; Wicomb 1998). I defer to the existing literature, especially that of Adhikari and Erasmus, in so far as it provides a broad socio-historical and cultural framework for locating the manner in which Coloured identity has been constructed and positioned alongside other groupings in SA, in both the apartheid and post-apartheid periods. There is, however, a gap in the existing literature, in so far as an analysis of the existential basis of Coloured identity is concerned, and it is this gap that this thesis aims to address. As such, this study draws on the notion of a 'fateful moment' in a provocative way to open up new ways of looking at Coloured identity.

### **'Who am I?' In search of the 'real me'**

The question, 'Who am I?' unpacked in this thesis, is cognisant of the socio-political and cultural framing within which identities are constructed, but it is also much more. It concerns the nature of being human. It seeks to understand how the Coloured students presented here grapple with finding their own personal meaning and purpose in life, beyond the historical narratives of Coloured identity. It is a question that attempts to situate in a more profound way, three Coloured students from UCT who were between the ages of six and ten when SA first became a democracy. These students carry the status of being privileged enough to gain access to, and to achieve high academic success<sup>11</sup> at an elite historically White university which is, itself, grappling with issues of transformation. As part of UCT's equity development initiatives, the MMUF programme's strong transformation agenda informs the types of interactions that MMUF fellows

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<sup>11</sup> The UNESCO (2010) measure of gross enrolment rate reflects that the overall percentage of South African students who are participating in higher education in SA is about 16%, of which 60% are White and only 12% are African and Coloured. It is estimated that less than 5% of Black South African students are able to gain success into the higher education sector. See also the report by CHE (2013) and Scott, Yeld and Hendry (2007) for more insight into how racially skewed student participation rates are in South African higher education.

engage in. As mentioned, the Coloured MMUF students presented here find that developing a true sense of belonging within this period of socio-political flux has forced them to confront the uncomfortable question of what it means to be Coloured<sup>12</sup> and the extent to which such meanings resonate with their own sense of self. Their experiences show on the one hand, the difficult process of trying to hold onto an existing sense of self, one which is socio-historically rooted in some of the traditional and stereotypical constructions of Coloured identity in the Western Cape. On the other hand their experiences also show the immense challenges and trauma involved in attempting to reconceptualise a different sense of self within a racially-charged South African landscape that is constantly shifting under the pressures brought about by the globalising effects of late modernity.<sup>13</sup> Giddens (1991) attaches much risk to this globalising process, which he argues has made social activity more reflexive in nature. It is this aspect of reflexivity that the research participants are displaying here.

At the heart of the reflections of Issachar, Margaret and Glenn on their Coloured identities, is an attempt to escape the limitations of a socio-historically constituted identity that has shaped and marked them as 'other'. They find themselves caught up in a situation in which the freedom of choice offered by a post-apartheid era has not been sufficiently realised so as to allow them to redefine and remake themselves beyond the confines of their Coloured label. These students' frustrations about reconstituting their identities resonate with O'Connell's (2014) critique of democracy in SA. She laments on the shameful extent to which the achievement of democracy in SA has left the masses largely uninformed and uncritical in their thinking about the relation between the human condition and freedom. She makes an assertive plea for much needed critical engagement around the core issues of change and transformation underlining our democracy, emphasised by the point that 'a person who is free from domination doesn't magically emerge because of being able to make a mark on a ballot sheet' (O'Connell 2014:4). It is this emerging sense of self that the students represented in this thesis are grappling with. It is their grappling with how they construct their own sense of belonging and purpose in the world versus the restrictions which others place on these constructions, which give rise to the contradictions of self that they experience. It is at the point where these contradictions of self-identity become too jarring and too intrusive to ignore, that they find themselves at a crossroad

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<sup>12</sup> See Erasmus's (2001) 'Introduction', where she offers some deep insights into the notions of Coloured 'discomfort'. Wicomb's (1998) postmodern literary perspective on the role of 'shame' that accompanied the constructions of Coloured identity in the shift from apartheid to democracy is also insightful here.

<sup>13</sup> I draw here specifically on Giddens' (1991) understanding of late modernity, which he also refers to as 'high modernity'. Giddens (1991:243) defines late modernity as a period 'marked by the radicalising and globalising of basic traits of modernity'.

in their lives, being called upon to make fundamental and life-changing choices, that occupies a central focus in this thesis.

As such, the concern here is with tracing how Issachar, Margaret and Glenn arrive at a decisive point in their lives where they call their very existence into question by asking 'Who am I, really, and why am I here?' In grappling with questions concerning the true nature of their being, they find themselves in the grips of an emotional roller-coaster, searching for that which will create a sense of wholeness in their lives. Their life-history narratives point to key events and experiences that have triggered some of the angst underlining their quests for self-discovery. The important question posed in this thesis, therefore, is directed towards identifying key moments of radical change in these three students' lives. One of the primary concerns is with ascertaining the manner in which the occurrences of these very specific life-defining moments have disrupted normal, everyday routines, to the extent that they created existential crises of being. Another primary concern is directed towards unpacking the nature of these existential crises, so as to assess the consequential impact thereof on these students' individual sense of self. In short, what is emphasised is a need to understand the process by which these students manage to rise out of a state of emotional turmoil to discover and create a renewed and evolving sense of personal investment in their sense of self. What is apparent is that this type of investment enables them to rewrite their biographical narratives through a transformed awareness about their 'embeddedness'<sup>14</sup> (Corrie and Milton 2000:18), in a socially complex and dynamic world. The term 'embeddedness' relates here to the research participants' awareness of their own sense of being in the world; that is, how they locate their sense of self. It involves the interpretation of their experiences and how this impacts the nature of their existence.

I present here, then, the struggles that three Coloured students' endure in their search to lay claim to an authentic<sup>15</sup> sense of self that sets them free from the burden of pretending to be that which they are not. I show the extent to which their critical reflexive engagement about their location and purpose in the world comes to be informed by their experiences of race and identity within the MMUF space. As such, I present MMUF here as a liminal space in which the research participants are able to encounter, recognise and adopt other possible modes of self-realisation.

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<sup>14</sup> Corrie and Milton (2000) use this term in their exploration of the benefits attached to existential therapeutic methods.

<sup>15</sup> Wheeler (2013) offers quite an insightful look into Heidegger's (1927) analysis of the difference between an 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' self, which will be unpacked later in this thesis. The term 'authentic' as used above draws on Heidegger and relates to an individual's established, resilient and autonomous sense of self-identity; it allows individuals a strong sense of security in the world.

## In search of synergy: honing theory to unpack transformations of the Coloured self

It needs to be stated from the outset that this is an empirical, and not a theoretical thesis. The fact that certain problems do become evident when drawing theories together is acknowledged here, but dealing with these discrepancies in a substantial way falls outside the scope of this study.

In this thesis, the focus on Coloured identity on the one hand, and specific theoretical underpinnings of the identity transformation process on the other, allows for a particular type of synergy. This synergy provides for quite an elaborate and sophisticated unpacking of the core theoretical concepts employed here so that they can be applied in quite a profound manner to the lived realities of the three Coloured students presented here. Such deep levels of engagement between theory and practice add value and richness to the utility of the theoretical concepts while also informing perspectives on the scope of race and identity dynamics amongst minorities in localised settings within SA.

In view of the above, this thesis locates the local constructions of Colouredness on the Cape Flats as a central mechanism through which the students represented here renegotiate and reconstruct their sense of self. As such, the examination of the identity transformation process embarked upon is framed within the dynamics, peculiarities and specificities of Coloured identity in the Western Cape. There is a call here to take seriously the uniqueness and precariousness which has historically shaped Coloured identity within traditional socio-political settings. These traditional perspectives on Colouredness need to be reshaped, reformulated, reimagined and reincorporated as part of a meaningful collaborative quest for true and legitimate acceptance in the post-apartheid nation-building project. The focus on the existential basis of Coloured identity offered in this thesis is a positive step in that direction. Adopting this type of theoretical gaze, illuminates what it *feels* like when core social constructs such as race, identity and class intersect in a highly conflicting manner. It offers a better sense of the nature of such conflicts, how it disorients and creates contradictions between the way individuals feel on the inside and act on the outside. In short, a 'fateful moment' analysis of identity helps us to understand why things happen, how it happens, what the consequences are and how individuals' deal with such consequences in order to create a sense of continuity and purpose in their lives.

## Core conceptual lens

The core theoretical concepts in this thesis are drawn from the work of Anthony Giddens, and, in particular, his notion of a 'fateful moment' (Giddens 1991). I use this as a tool with which to locate those significant instances of radical disruption and personal crises in the life-narratives of the three research participants. Giddens' (1991) analysis shows how the movement from a traditional to a modern context has ushered in elements of increased risk and conflict that continually threatens the stability and continuity of the individual's sense of self. These severe disruptions of the self create a state of inner turmoil and intense anxiety which forces individuals to confront the meaning of their existence. This is what Giddens refers to as a 'fateful moment'. I draw on Giddens' (1991) analysis to shed light on how SA's transition process from apartheid to democracy has placed immense pressure on one of the most unequal and racially divided society's in the world, a society that needs to take on the onerous task of redefining and reconstituting a new South African nation. South Africa's ongoing struggle for socio-economic freedom and equality, coupled with incidents of socio-political unrest and insecurity on the one hand, and opportunities for growth and development on the other, renders a context of risk and possibility. It is here that the battle for a renewed sense of purpose in life must be fought. I locate the research participants' and their individual quests for a renewed and transformed sense of self-affirmation, within this process of intense socio-political transitioning, which is itself an outcome of the modern condition addressed by Giddens. Within this context of multiple choices and possibilities, each of the students presented here are faced with the challenge of creating a sense of continuity of self so as to move forward with their lives.

This process of identity transformation occupies centre stage in this thesis. For the Coloured students presented here, it is a journey of self-discovery. I employ Giddens' 'fateful moment' concept to unpack the difficult process of self-transformation through which each student moves, up to the stage that they are able to rise and take control of their own lives.

## Methodology

I have used criterion-based sampling, so as to emphasise some of the unique features of the Coloured research participants. Built on data derived from personal observations, extensive interviews, reflective essays, personal correspondence and mentoring of these exceptional students over a two year period, what is offered here are some unique insights into what it *feels*



like to be Coloured students yearning to experience a sense of personal fulfilment and completeness in a South African university setting where race still matters. The research presented here is qualitative in nature, and draws on both critical theory and constructivism paradigms. I adopt a qualitative case-study approach in order to convey the distinctiveness and richness conveyed in Issachar, Margaret and Glenn's respective experiences of growing up on the Cape Flats and attending an institution like UCT. In keeping with the criteria most suited for a qualitative case study methodology, I have drawn on content analysis as an approach to sorting and analysing my data. I have, furthermore, employed the use of constructivist grounded theory, with its focus on the subjective construction of social reality (Charmaz 2000), to increase the depth and focus of the interpretations that emerge from the content analysis process. Ethnographic tools also avail themselves to be used quite efficiently within the interpretivist framework of qualitative case study research (Merriam 1988; White et al. 2009). I have drawn on these tools to inform my understanding of the ways in which everyday phenomena construct reality. Willis (2007 cited in White et al. 2009:22) asserts that ethnography is a 'means of gathering data in authentic (e.g., real-world) environments ...[that] puts the researcher in the settings that he or she wants to study'. Qualitative case study methodology is therefore highly attractive for the research being undertaken here, both in terms of its applicability and also the possibilities that it generates when using thick description to analyse a particular social phenomenon. Furthermore, qualitative case study methodology has a high heuristic and inductive value, in terms of knowledge production and innovation (Merriam 1988; Stake 1995).

### **Developing an informed approach to Black student identity**

Paying attention to the 'fateful moment' episodes in the biographical narratives of the Coloured research participants opens up new and dynamic possibilities for interrogating other group identities in SA in a similar fashion. This type of analysis lends itself to be applied more collaboratively and innovatively in the current South African higher education context where student profiles are rapidly changing. The valuable insights provided by this thesis into the experiences of Coloured students studying within historically White higher education institutions, serves to highlight the complexities, distinctiveness and multi-faceted nature of Black student identity. There is a dire need on the part of these institutions, specifically those labelled as being historically White, to be better equipped in dealing with the dynamics of race that exists amongst this new and diverse breed of university goers, all of whom are eagerly searching for a sense of personal acceptance and belonging. Simply speaking about a

homogenous White and Black student experience is not enough. The hierarchical ordering of apartheid-designated racial groupings and the concomitant differential access to prescriptive ways of being human, has meant that the lived experiences of the Black African grouping located at the bottom of the social hierarchy is inherently different to the Coloured experience of apartheid. The residual effects of these differentiated experiences are what we are now grappling with in our newly claimed democracy. From an educational policy perspective, the complexities attached to being Coloured in the post-apartheid era, therefore call for a disaggregation of Blackness, and it is here that the dialogue about what it means to be a South African must begin. An added benefit emerging from the analysis offered here is that it also provides educational institutions with a basis for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of specific equity development initiatives. Paying attention to the structure, design, mission, objectives and underlying ethos of successful equity development programmes such as MMUF, offers higher education institutions in SA a solid platform for pursuing equity goals and for affecting positive change. An institution such as UCT has a wonderful opportunity, given its location and growing Black student membership, for playing an important role in this process.

## Overview and organisation of chapters

Chapter 2 is divided into two main sections: a theory section and a literature review section. In the first section, I present the theoretical underpinnings of my conceptual framework. I discuss Giddens' (1991) analysis of how the period of late modernity has influenced the identity construction process. I unpack some of the dilemmas that Giddens identifies and show how these dilemmas impact an individual's ability to construct and maintain a continued sense of self in the world. I define the concept of a 'fateful moment' and illustrate its relevance for analysing Coloured identity.

In the second section I present a critical review of the literature dealing with the theoretical concepts of self-identity and identity transformation. I discuss through comparison, some of the key theoretical approaches that inform the understanding of the identity transformation process presented in this thesis. I explore the manner in which the various theoretical approaches are located and how these locations are able to produce particular perspectives on how the identity transformation process unfolds. I locate the work of Giddens as an anchor theory here and illustrate how various components taken from the other theoretical approaches can be used to enrich and extend the depth of Giddens' conceptual tools.

In chapter 3, I establish the context for understanding the nature of the relationships between the UCT space, the MMUF space and the students that inhabit both these spaces. I describe the MMUF Programme and locate it within the ambit of UCT's equity development initiatives. I show how the MMUF space impacts Black MMUF students' perceptions of self and forces them to reflect in a very particular way on their racial identities in SA. I reveal my own role within the MMUF Programme so as to establish the basis of my relationship with the MMUF students. This discussion allows me to provide valuable insights into how MMUF functions as a transformative space.

In chapter 4, I unpack the methodological approach adopted in this study. I establish the foundations of the qualitative methodology employed here, comprising an overlap between the post positivist, critical theory and constructivist paradigms. I critique the extent to which traditional positivist assessment criteria of validity, replicability and generalisability are found wanting for assessing interpretive qualitative research where there is a focus on subjective experiences. I outline the procedures that were followed in selecting research participants, explain the data collection process and discuss some of the ethical considerations that came into play.

I present the biographical narratives of the three research participants in chapter five. I resort to using the description of 'research participant' as opposed to case study in this thesis, as the former has a warmer and more humane feel to it, while also signalling the agency of the students who are involved. I locate the research participants in their home, school and university settings and provide a contextual overview of their lives. My intention in this chapter is to locate the 'fateful moment' as a naturally occurring event in the walk of their everyday interactions. I strive here to provide a sense of the students' realness, of who they are, their struggles and aspirations.

Chapters' 6, 7 and 8 deal with analysing the 'fateful moment' experiences of each research participant. I draw on the theoretical framework discussed in chapter two to illustrate why such a moment arises, the circumstances under which it happens and the manner in which it destabilises and renders vulnerable these three individuals' sense of being and location in the world. I show how the MMUF Programme acts as a liminal space in which they are able to seek other possibilities for finding a meaningful existence. I reveal the ability that each of these students possess in redefining their Coloured status to satisfy the need for social justice and redress in society.

Chapter 9 concludes with a brief summary of my findings. I enter into a discussion of how the respective 'fateful moment' episodes unpacked in chapters 6, 7 and 8 allows for new and innovative ways for viewing and using the 'fateful moment' concept. I show how the MMUF structure facilitates this process. Underlining this section is a deeper understanding of the complexities of Colouredness and the types of experiences that inform this identity in its search for a sense of home.



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## CHAPTER TWO

# Conceptual framework and Literature Review: Understanding Identity Transformations

### Introduction

The identity construction process is dynamic. Individuals react in a variety of ways to the circumstances that shape and mould their lives. How they interpret and internalise their lived experiences impacts the extent of their groundedness in the world. Being grounded means having a strong sense of self-identity, which gives us a sense of belonging, mission and purpose in life. To the extent that we are able to construct a unified sense of self, our external displays of identity need to complement the way we *feel* on the inside. When the internal and external facets of our identities are not in harmony with each other, this impacts the coherence of the biographical narrative we construct about our sense of self in the world.

The period of late modernity has profoundly increased the number of variables that are able to create a state of disunity within the identity of the self. In response to this threat of disunity, the self is forced to set up defensive mechanisms in an attempt to insure its stability and continued existence. Such defensive mechanisms can, however, be placed under severe strain and become vulnerable when individuals find themselves in exceptional situations in which they are forced to make choices which could potentially be life-changing. These moments of severe intensity, when the unity of the self and the coherence of the biographical narrative is threatened or in a state of turmoil, will receive attention in this chapter. The reflexive ability of the self to adapt, rebuild and remake itself as a viable entity with a renewed sense of presence and belonging in the world, will be highlighted.

### Overview

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section I draw on a social constructionist model in an attempt to trace some of the influences of late modernity in developing our understanding of

the ways in which identity transformations occur.<sup>1</sup> The stance adopted here is that the very idea of a *transformation* invokes an image of *drastic* change that alters the way in which an individual views him- or herself in relation to others. Having established the socially constructed nature of identity, we need to recognise the contexts in which change occurs and also the sense of continuation of self-identity that endures amidst these changes. This implies that our experiences are not isolated instances but form part of larger social interactional contexts in which our sense of self-identity, our need to belong and our purpose in life is invested. This section also discusses the manner in which drastic change is constituted and manifested in the identity construction process, and our ability to sustain a continued sense of cohesion between past, present and future selves in an evolving context of intense sequestration of experience.

The second section surveys some of the key literature dealing with the concept of self-identity and the identity transformation process. In this section I develop some awareness of the ways in which late modernity has created an ideal space for debating the meaning of core social scientific phenomena. I argue that the process of identifying similar social phenomena across theoretical orientations and disciplinary contexts is an important resource that serves to enhance the analytical process. In fact, what I hope to demonstrate here are some of the overlaps as well as the distinctiveness of some of the theoretical approaches that inform our understanding of the identity transformation process. Such analysis provides the opportunity for comparing some of the key theoretical underpinnings of identity transformation. This will allow for a more nuanced understanding of Giddens' (1991) approach to locating the 'self' and its 'fateful moment' episodes in contexts of high risk that have come to be associated with late modernity.

The type of descriptive and comparative analysis that occurs in this section also occurs at points in the first section of this chapter. The organisation and development of the conceptual framework in the first section has necessitated an on-going review of the literature throughout this chapter, and section two can be regarded as a more extensive and elaborate critical analysis of some of the theoretical traditions that surface in section one.

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<sup>1</sup> Weigert, Teitge, and Teitge (1986), provide an insightful overview of the historical development of the concept of identity as a social construct.

## SECTION 1

### **Fateful Moments: A radical disruption and transformation of identity**

#### **Overview**

A central focus in this section concerns Giddens' (1991) exploration of the development of individuals' awareness of their sense of self within the period of late modernity. Particular attention is given to Giddens' (1991:112-114; 126-133) understanding of the concepts of 'fateful moments' and 'protective cocoon' in relation to this developing sense of self. The manner in which 'fateful moments' impact and penetrate the 'protective cocoon' is indicative of the *extent* of change and disruption that occurs within the self. In such instances reconstructing and reinforcing the protective covering of the cocoon is crucial for the continuation of one's self-identity in the world. Giddens' (1991) view of the 'reflexive project of the self' as a vital defence mechanism for maintaining the continuation of self-identity is of prime importance with respect to this. Giddens' provocative use of language to label his core theoretical concepts is striking. For this reason it will be placed alongside the different terms used by other authors who also describe facets of the identity transformation process. I do this to examine how different theoretical orientations approach and construct meaning in the world, and how these give rise to variations in understanding the form and function of identity transformation. In this way I hope to show how Giddens' contribution to the debate can be distinguished and foregrounded.

Juxtaposing various authors' use of the terms associated with the phenomenon of identity transformation will also allow us to get a better sense of how researchers are continually engaged in a dynamic process of constructing meaning through varied but interlinked descriptions of social scientific phenomena. Of particular relevance here is the manner in which such descriptive terminology is able to invoke an array of images that allow us to understand particular characteristics of identity construction in a variety of ways, thereby adding richness and depth to debates in this area. A few examples that will be touched on here are drawn from Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman's (1993) use of the terms '*consistency of self*' and 'triggers'; Mezirow's (1990) use of the phrase 'horizons of expectation' and his (1990; 1991) notion of 'perspective transformations'; Giddens' (1991) incorporation of Goffman's idea of '*Umwelt*' and Ivanič's (1998) use of the term 'critical experiences' (Travisano's [1970] reference to 'universe of discourse' and 'informing aspect'



will be dealt with in section two). All of these descriptors allows for a more informed analysis of Giddens' concepts of 'fateful moments' and 'protective cocoon'.

### **The socially constructed self: Negotiating access, boundaries, and the development of agency**

Let us begin our discussion with a brief consideration of how self-identity is formed and located in the context alluded to at the start of this chapter. In terms of the social constructionist model, the construction of self-identity is always done in relation to others, through a process of 'creating and negotiating' (Shotter 1993:6). Within social constructionism the notion of 'self' is therefore a dynamic entity which encapsulates 'the evolving, self-aware production of a series of interactional relationships that lead to the development of the sense of individuality over the life course' (Weigert et al. 1986:40). In Mead (1934) and Blumer's (1969) terms (both cited in Milliken and Schreiber 2012:689) the identification of self also signals that a person 'can act socially toward him or her self as she or he might toward others'. In terms of Mead's theory, the self is comprised of the 'I' and the 'me'. The 'I' is that portion of the self 'that responds freely, creatively, and spontaneously,' while the 'me' portion relates to those conformative aspects of which the self as 'actor is fully aware'. These include 'attitudes, expectations, beliefs, understandings, and perspectives about the self that have been learned from others' (Milliken and Schreiber 2012:690).

Hawkes (1977:17) argues that social structures are reference points for locating ourselves in the world. He asserts further that the methods we use to perceive reality are 'inherently biased' and therefore impact on what is perceived. In this sense an observer 'creates' meaning through the process of establishing a 'relationship' with that which is being observed (ibid). Hawkes claims that it is this 'relationship' between two entities and not the independent natures of the entities themselves that is of prime concern. In Terre Blanche and Durrheim's (1999) assessment, social construction happens like a language in setting up relationships and establishing meaning in the world:

Social constructionists want to flag the idea that representations of reality... practices... and physical arrangements ... are structured like a language, or a system of signs. As such, they construct particular versions of the world by providing a framework or system through which we can understand objects and practices, as well as understand who we are and what we should do in relation to these systems.

(Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999:151-152)

Shotter's (1993) analysis takes this a step further by identifying elements of differentiation within the relationships that are established in social settings. He asserts that despite our participation in 'the same sea of creative interrelational activity,' our 'unique' selves are determined by our placements within the 'seascape' (p.6). He argues that these spaces are occupied solely by the individual, and are not neutral in the sense that the individual is 'or can become answerable or responsible to others' for occupying such positions (Shotter 1984 in Shotter 1993:6). The position one occupies is therefore subject to severe scrutiny by those group members who share in the same 'social reality', where one is 'accountable to others', having to 'justify one's actions to them, when challenged' (Shotter 1984 cited in Shotter 1993:8). What becomes apparent though is that over and above one's access to the general 'seascape', the 'seascape' itself is set up in such a way that either limits or facilitates 'passage into certain regions of it' (Shotter 1993:6). What evolves out of this is what Shotter (1984 cited in Shotter 1993:6) calls 'a political economy of developmental opportunities' since the levels of access to these regions are not the same for everyone. Individuals therefore become actively involved in the process of negotiating access into tightly controlled regions, often through redefining their sense of self and the new space that they enter. Shotter's analysis offers useful insights into Giddens' work. Shotter's (1984) focus on how individuals interpret, participate and define themselves in the world resonates with Giddens' (1984) use of the term 'social theory', which relates to those aspects of life which involve 'the nature of human action' and the self as an active agent. As such we are able to see how Giddens' focus on the self as a dynamic social entity which is actively engaged in finding a sense of location in the world, allows for a more focused analysis of individual interaction.

The work of Ivanič (1998) also offers some useful insights to the discussion above. Ivanič's (1998) study deals with the written constructions of mature students' identities and reveals that they often experience great difficulty in transitioning into university life. Mature students entering university for the first time experience conflict between the social practices they have developed outside education and those that are privileged by the university. Her study draws on the New Literacy Studies (NLS) approach in which language and literacy are viewed as forms of social practices,<sup>2</sup> which are context based. Ivanič (1998) shows how varying degrees of access to 'discoursal resources' impacts the individual's realisation of self. Drawing on the sociocultural research of Wertsch's (1991:94) concepts of 'toolkit', 'an array of mediational means' and 'mediated action', Ivanič

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<sup>2</sup> See Street (1984) and Gee (1996) for insights into NLS approaches, in which meanings and the social practices associated with those meanings are contextually situated.

problematizes the manner in which choices and access to resources are limited in specific social settings. Wertsch (1995:71) asserts that sociocultural analysis must be grounded in 'a unit of analysis', namely 'human action'. Drawing on Bakhtin (1986) and especially Vygotsky's (1981) concept of 'mediational means' (psychological tools), Wertsch shows how the employment of these mediational means, e.g. language, within a unit of analysis leads to qualitative changes in actions (Wertsch 1995:63). Wertsch (1995:65-66) uses this analysis as a basis for arguing that agents can therefore only be defined in relation to the mediational means that they possess and employ. Ivanič builds upon this line of argument and asserts that an individual's access to particular types of 'mediational means':

Is unequally distributed, and dependent on people's social circumstances such as education, employment opportunities and interpersonal networks. This means that some people's 'toolkit' will be bigger, and/or contain more statusful 'tools' than others.

(Ivanič 1998:53)

In this way limits and barriers are placed on the realisation of self-identity, relative to the level of access one has within the 'seascape' as well the 'mediational means' one possesses to negotiate such access. Ivanič uses the concept of a 'text' as a metaphor with which to discuss issues of identity construction and cultural critique. This is similar to Shotter and Gergen's formulation, where the text undergoes a process of production in which certain parameters are set which both enable and limit the production process:

Persons are largely ascribed identities according to the manner of their embedding within a discourse... In this way cultural texts furnish their 'inhabitants' with the resources for the formation of selves; they lay out an array of enabling potentials, while simultaneously establishing a set of constraining boundaries beyond which selves cannot be easily made.

(Shotter and Gergen 1989:ix)

Of importance here is the way in which one can redefine oneself within existing discourses while still actively contributing to constructing different perspectives about those discourses. Ivanič's (1998) reference to 'possibilities for self-hood' within institutional contexts, shows that adults can either adopt existing values and practices of their new setting, or challenge dominant positions and opt for less privileged and less dominant forms of self-hood. This suggests a process of change and transformation enacted by individuals within the university setting that challenges the status quo. Through these actions individuals come to recognise new forms of self-hood, supporting the position that 'identity is not socially *determined* but socially *constructed*' (Ivanič 1998:12).

By adopting a critical view of the social construction of identity, Ivanič acknowledges the ways in which dominant ideologies exert influence over and restrict the sense of self that individuals possess, and which they struggle to maintain and validate. It is this struggle for self-hood that Ivanič presents in her analysis of the writing of mature students. She validates the position of mature students by drawing on Giddens' attribution of the availability of multiple identities for the self in the late modern age. In doing so she is able to link the possibilities created by modernity as a mechanism which affirms decisions made by adults about resuming their studies and 'recategorizing themselves as adults-with-higher-education' (Ivanič 1998:14). This striving for the adoption of alternative possibilities for self-identity reveals a process through which the self is able to find 'new ways of being in the world' and new forms of 'citizenship' (Shotter 1993:21). Drawing on Ivanič's analyses of adult student's experiences of risk in the higher education setting, allows us to get a more enriched sense of Giddens' work and its application to the experiences of the Coloured students presented in this thesis.

As stated above, we are confronted with a world which continually takes the supposed luxury of choice to new and innovative levels. This does however come with its own problems, since we are constantly called upon to monitor our levels of participation amidst these multiple possibilities, which together constitute a 'climate of risk' (Giddens 1991:114). Within such a 'climate of risk' the stakes are raised all the time. This gives rise to 'new mechanisms of self-identity' in which individuals engage in a dynamic manner with 'social influences' which determine, but which in turn are also determined by their actions (Giddens 1991). Giddens' (1991) discussion of the concepts of 'fateful moments' and 'reflexive project of the self' within the context of late modernity, therefore has important relevance for this discussion and will now be considered in more detail.

### **Fateful moments: Unpacking the theoretical basis of the concept**

Giddens (1991) adoption of the term 'fateful moments' to talk about the nature of identity transformations within late modernity has evolved out of his earlier works. His problematising of some of the core conceptual issues within social theory (Giddens 1979), and his work on structuration theory (Giddens 1984), provide valuable insights into the conceptual development and progression of the term 'fateful moments' which he later adopts. His 1979 work highlights the important role played by the performance of regular, everyday actions in creating a sense of normality and order in the world. He uses this understanding of 'routinization' – that which is

performed regularly and repetitively on a daily basis – to identify the nature of the circumstances under which individuals deviate from everyday routines and the impact thereof on those individuals. In order to investigate the latter, Giddens' (1979) draws on the concept of 'mob behavior' from the works of authors such as Le Bon. Through his analyses of mob behaviour Giddens is able to illustrate how a 'critical situation' develops and functions. A critical situation is understood here as resulting from circumstances that severely disrupt the regular patterns and routine actions of daily life (Giddens 1979:123-124). Giddens distinguishes his understanding of mob behaviour from Le Bon's, who saw mob behaviour as a facet of crowd behaviour. Unlike Le Bon, Giddens (1979) views crowd behavior as a form of social interaction where there is a deviation from those normal everyday routines that are responsible for reproducing social systems.

In his unpacking of Le Bon, Giddens is able to hone in on the manner in which individuals who are part of a crowd lose their ability to act rationally and to evaluate situations and actions effectively. Instead, they become extremely susceptible to suggestions and emotions of the crowd and particularly to that of the crowd leaders. This results in animalistic and instinctive behaviour, which in everyday routine activities would otherwise not even be considered or entertained (Giddens 1979). He therefore limits his analysis of Le Bon's work to specific elements operating within the crowd, namely, the elements of suggestion and regression, and the role played by the crowd leader. Giddens asserts that these elements or criteria of crowd behavior are not unique to crowds, but occur in a variety of different, unrelated contexts in which the only common factor shared by all is the radical disruption of the everyday routines which formed part of the participants' daily lives (1979:125).

In his 1984 analysis, Giddens locates the above concept of 'routinization' as a core element of structuration theory. According to Giddens, the acting out of routines forms an important psychological basis from which individuals derive and maintain a sense of trust in their interactions with the world on a daily basis. Routine is located in what Giddens refers to as 'practical consciousness' (1984:xxiii). The latter, in plain terms, is a consciousness developed through and in practice. This is evident for example, in the skill one possesses in being able to drive a car. Such driving skills are derived from one's practical consciousness. This is especially important for 'routinization' since individuals are so unaware of this type of bodily knowledge. Daily routines are therefore extremely important. The very act of performing these routines creates a protective barrier, a buffer of sorts, between what Giddens views as 'the potentially explosive content of the

unconscious' and the reflexivity displayed by individuals (1984:xxiii). Giddens proposes that daily activities involve ontological security, which is a sense of trust and location within the subjective, everyday experiences of the world. Ontological security is created through the establishment of routines (1984:50), which form the basis of the defence mechanisms that the individual develops in fending off anxiety. Such defence mechanisms are bolstered by the caring and nurturing relationships that form part of the individual's socialisation.

In the same study, Giddens (1984) uses the term 'critical situations', which he interprets as a situation in which anxiety cannot be buffered or controlled by the body's current defensive system. He adds that 'critical situations' arise as a result of severe disruptions to everyday routines, where the nature of the disruption is such that it penetrates the protective devices in place. Giddens sums up his understanding of 'critical situations' as pertaining to those 'circumstances of radical disjuncture of an unpredictable kind... situations that threaten or destroy the certitudes of institutionalized routines' (1984:61). This puts in place a basic conceptual understanding of how certain events are able to penetrate the body's defence mechanisms to create a state of ontological insecurity. Later, Giddens (1991) uses this knowledge as a basis for refining his analysis of how the conditions of late modernity change and impact the ways in which the self (together with its protective cocoon) is formed, the challenges it faces, and the manner in which it sustains and defends itself against the intrusion of 'fateful moments'.

In order to develop his understanding of the term 'fateful', Giddens (1991:112) first distinguishes it from the meaning of the term 'fatalism' which he defines as 'resigned acceptance that events should be allowed to take their course'. In contrast to this understanding of fatalism, he argues that 'fateful happenings' direct particular focus on the disruptive consequences that such an event has in store at both an individual and a group level. Giddens goes on to distinguish between a 'fateful happening' and a 'fateful moment'. The former, he argues, has a bearing on both the individual or group level and has to do with an element of 'risk' which has the potential to be 'life-threatening,' such as in the 'mob' scenario discussed earlier. Giddens thus uses the concept of a 'fateful happening' as a broad sociological category. He asserts that 'fateful moments' however, operate primarily at the individual level. By focussing on the individual, Giddens is able to pay attention to differences that exist amongst individuals, based on a categorisation of individual responses to disruptive events:

Fateful moments are those when individuals are called on to take decisions that are particularly consequential for their ambitions, or more generally for their future lives. Fateful moments are highly consequential for a person's destiny. (Giddens 1991:112)

The extent of the impact produced by an occurrence stands out here. In an attempt to define what counts as 'consequential', Giddens (1991:112-113) first refers to 'inconsequential' moments in life, which he argues relates to seemingly insignificant occurrences in the daily routines we follow. He goes on to make a distinction between leisure activities and activities carried out in more formalised settings such as at work. The latter he states are 'generally more consequential' in form and function. These 'more consequential' activities are often part of a routine, in which structures are in place to deal with possible problems that may occur (for example, within an organisation, specific e-mail problems are referred to the information technology department which then takes responsibility for rectifying the problem). However, as Giddens points out, there may come a time when an individual is faced with a situation which seems to be 'both highly consequential and problematic', and these, he argues, would fall under the category of 'fateful moments':

Fateful moments are times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands, as it were, at a crossroads in his existence; or when a person learns of information with fateful consequences. (Giddens 1991:113)

Furthermore:

Fateful moments are threatening for the protective cocoon which defends the individual's ontological security, because the 'business as usual' attitude that is so important to that cocoon is inevitably broken through. (Giddens 1991:114)

We can gather from the above that highly individualised encounters determine the extent of the impact on the individual's ontological security. In other words, 'fateful moments' are potentially disruptive to an individual's 'sense of continuity and order in events' (Giddens 1991) and could lead to an instance of identity transformation within such an individual. Listed amongst the examples of what could be classified as 'fateful moments' are sitting for examinations; agreeing to marry; divorce; deciding on a particular field of study; hearing the results of a medical examination, and losing a large portion of one's life savings to gambling. He asserts that these types of fateful moment 'possibilities' are defined as fateful because of 'their particular relation to risk' since the decisions made at the time are measured against the possibilities for success and error and the subsequent consequences of these for the individual's life.

If Giddens' analysis is taken a step further, then it becomes evident that the manner in which the protective cocoon operates is relative to the contexts in which it is embedded. Thus, when viewing the research participants in this thesis, I find that all of them live in the Cape Town area and are recipients of an MMUF scholarship at UCT, a historically White South African university. When these students travel to the United States to join up with their American peers, each of them could potentially be confronted with dramatic challenges to their established notions of race and identity which they have derived from the South African context. My previous work in this area (Nomdo 2006) illustrates this in detail. Viewed from this perspective, Giddens' understanding of the contextual basis of the protective cocoon alluded to above, would thus require a specific type of sensitivity to the symptoms and defences that the research participants exhibit when engaging in emotively charged debates around issues of race and identity with their American peers. In those instances where the protective cocoon is unable to repel potential disruptions, the individual's sense of self is forced into a state of uncertainty and insecurity, creating a disconnection within the individual and between the individual and the outside world. Rebuilding the protective defence mechanisms of the cocoon is therefore an important part of reconnecting with, and finding meaning in the world.

It is significant to note that Giddens' analyses of individual existence in a climate of risk, his concern with questions of ontological security and the search for meaning, and his emphasis on the consequences of decision-making, underlines the existentialist nature of his work. More will be said about the existentialist nature of Giddens' work in section two of this chapter.

## **Unpacking Ivanič**

The work of Ivanič (1998) alluded to earlier, adds useful insights to the debate concerning a crisis of the self, outlined above. Ivanič adopts a 'discourse perspective' in her unpacking of the relationship between students' writing and self-identity. This entails an approach to discourse as a 'mediating mechanism in the social construction of identity' (Ivanič 1998). The understanding of the term discourse in this sense pertains to the manner in which individuals take on and appropriate certain identities which are achieved 'by producing and receiving culturally recognized, ideologically shaped representations of reality' (1998:17). The concept of 'self' is thus understood as something that is created in discourse, and here Ivanič (1998) purposefully adopts a narrow understanding of discourse by focussing on verbal language in written texts. In utilising this discourse perspective she is able to



draw on linguistic methods of analyses to unpack how identities are revealed through writing; something, she argues, which is lacking in social psychological analysis. While adopting this narrow stance, Ivanič does acknowledge the broader sense in which the term 'discourse' is understood and used (for example, by Foucault).<sup>3</sup> The broader use of the term 'discourse' includes forms of visual and bodily representations and also 'all the social practices associated with a... set of values, beliefs and power relations' (1998:17-18). Her aim, however, is to draw on linguistics and its application to written texts so as to show how 'language constructs identity in the process of writing' (p. 19). Ivanič asserts that the characteristics associated with discourses are derived from the 'values, beliefs and practices of particular social groups' and that these characteristics 'position the writers' as participants in these 'values, beliefs and practices'. This implies that writers, through selecting certain words and phrases, make active choices (relative to the resources they have access to) so as to show which groups, interests and ideologies 'they are aligning themselves with' (Ivanič 1998:46).

Ivanič's exploration of the relationship between 'writing and the discursal construction of identity' also highlights the element of risk present in the individual choices that her students make. Her focus on the writing of mature students is centred on the notion of 'critical experiences'.<sup>4</sup> Ivanič's (1998) understanding of 'critical experiences' relates to individuals' significant encounters with negotiating different facets of the world over their lifespan. This understanding of the concept of 'critical experience' is drawn from a more psycho-social analysis of lifespan identity theory.<sup>5</sup> She refers to the significant encounters that individual's experience during crucial periods of change in their lives (such as adults making a decision to pursue university studies quite late in life) as 'critical events and moments'.<sup>6</sup> She is able to show that mature students' late entry into university constitutes 'moments of flux... between... [individuals' sense of their] different selves' (Ivanič 1998:16). This late entry into university constitutes a critical experience, and this 'foregrounds change in identity' (ibid).

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<sup>3</sup> Ivanič (1998) makes reference to Foucault's broad use of the term discourse in relation to 'technologies' that produce 'powerful ideologies which position subjects'. She uses Foucault's idea of 'technologies of power' to show how dominant ideologies limit and inhibit an individual's sense of self, but takes this a step further by acknowledging individual agency in the struggle for alternative definitions of the self, which she illustrates through her analysis of students' writing. For a more informed understanding of the term 'discourse' in social theory, see Hook (2001) for an insightful critique of Foucault's use of 'discourse' in psychology.

<sup>4</sup> Drawn from Honess and Yardley's (1987) edited work on lifespan identity, especially those articles dealing with critical periods (such as adolescence), and critical events and moments (such as childbirth).

<sup>5</sup> See Zuma's (2013) psycho-social study conducted at UCT which analyses how race and class affects social groupings.

<sup>6</sup> See also Woods' (1993) use of the term 'critical event' as a creative and transformative learning intervention in the primary school setting.

As Ivanič (1998) points out, mature students represent somewhat of an anomaly amongst the general stream of undergraduate students. They bring with them a whole range of personal experiences of the world, such as those experiences related to work, marriage, parenthood, financial responsibility, established social practices, and ideological orientations, with which many of their younger counterparts may not yet identify. The risk factor involved in taking a decision to enter university is thus quite high for this mature group of students, signalling 'a turning-point in their lives' (Ivanič 1998:5) in terms of adapting and competing in a setting that is largely ignorant of their circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Ivanič (1998:13) asserts that mature students enter a higher education context where certain 'ways of being are privileged... by more powerful groups within the institution'. She adopts a critical stance towards the social construction of identity amongst the students in her study. She asserts that there is a need to 'show how social construction operates in real people's day-to-day lives' and that reference must be made to the 'tensions and conflicts' that exist between the 'available... resources' (some of which are valued more than others) from which an individual constructs a sense of self (1998:20). Using this approach she is able to recognise the extent to which dominant ideologies function in 'constraining people's sense of themselves' within the higher education setting. At the same time this critical stance also permits the recognition of individual agency in challenging and resisting dominant ideologies in the struggle to construct 'alternative definitions' of self (Ivanič 1998). This tension between structural constraints and the enactment of agency for renewed definitions of self-identity<sup>8</sup> is what Ivanič reveals in her analyses of mature students writing. She draws on Giddens' 'reflexive project of the self' to assert that while identity undergoes change, there are also certain aspects which create a sense of continuity, thereby emphasising the 'embeddedness'<sup>9</sup> (Corrie and Milton 2000) of identity 'in events and experience' (Ivanič 1998). For adult students who are trying to balance their fear of being different and of being made to feel out of place, with the potential contributions their experiences from the outside would enable them to make, this is quite a daunting undertaking. A brief look into the schooling contexts out of which these mature students have progressed, will make this more apparent.

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<sup>7</sup> See also the developments made in personality psychology where 'narrative identity processing' is used to show how difficult transitioning episodes in adults' lives revolve around achieving a sense of 'subjective well-being' (Pals 2006:1083).

<sup>8</sup> Zuma (2013, 13-14) refers to this occurrence as a break between the 'macro-micro relationship of values and practices'.

<sup>9</sup> Corrie and Milton (2000) draw particular attention to existential therapy's view that people are 'embedded' in the world, not as individuals but as 'Dasein', a term used to define a person's status of 'Being-in-the-world' (which I will elaborate on later). The manner in which we perceive, experience and interpret the world comprises Dasein.

The British higher educational context in which Ivanič's (1988) research is based, sees mature students attempting to navigate an 'unfamiliar' world where they experience a stark tension between developing a sense of belonging in the university context while simultaneously resisting some of the norms and values framing that context. Although students who progress from high school directly to university also experience these difficulties in their transition into university life, the mature students in Ivanič's (1998) study represent an extreme case of such transitions. These mature students' do not have the benefit of 'a steady, gradual apprenticeship in the language of education over a period of 14 years full-time schooling' afforded to the traditional undergraduate (1998:5). This lack of continuity in the progression of mature students' education from high school into university intensifies the nature of their struggles to compete, belong and succeed in higher education.

I have drawn on the extreme nature of these mature students' experiences underlined by Ivanič to help shed light on the nature of the transitions of traditional Black South African students, the majority of whom are first generation university entrants, into historically White university settings.<sup>10</sup> Although Black South African students may have progressed into university directly from high school, the differentiated nature of a typical Black township schooling experience offers very little in terms of adequate preparation for a university setting modelled on White, English middle class values and experiences.<sup>11</sup> My earlier research (Nomdo 2006) has shown how Black students struggle with negotiating and articulating their township identities in historically White higher educational settings where, despite the rapid increase in Black student numbers, White social dominance and academic achievement remains the norm.<sup>12</sup> It is this lack of congruence between these students schooling backgrounds and the university setting that stands out here.

Ivanič's (1998) lifespan approach therefore allows us to conceive of the particular type of expected educational progression that is supposed to accompany entry into the university setting. It also allows for a particular focus on the consequences that result from a break or disruption in the normal development of that progression. In this sense the seemingly normal entry into university can be

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<sup>10</sup> See Luckett and Luckett's (2009) article on first generation learners in the South African higher education setting for more insight into this.

<sup>11</sup> Scott (2013), in his motivation for the establishment of extended curriculum programmes, offers extremely revealing insights into the historical and systemic development of the 'tensions between the realities of [Black] students' backgrounds and the traditional practices of [historically White] higher education' institutions in SA.

<sup>12</sup> For more recent and detailed insight into the plight of working class Black students, see Zuma's social psychological analysis of how factors of race and class affect intergroup relations at UCT.

problematised in terms of the anxious nature of the experiences of some non-traditional students who enter this context. They do so without possessing any of the recognised capital (knowledge and skills base, linguistic competencies, social practices, and intrinsic orientation) valued by the institution.<sup>13</sup> Unpacking the nature of the impact on self-identity that results from shifting from one space into another, for example, from home into school, high school into university, plays an important part in understanding the intensity of the change that individuals' undergo. Ivanič's (1998) focus on students' writing therefore allows for a more enriched micro focus approach to unpacking the complexities of identity transformation and continuation of self-identity. Her focus on how mature students, in their writing, navigate, resist and negotiate institutional discourses in an attempt to locate a sense of self which they are comfortable with, offers a means by which Giddens' 'fateful moment' concept can to be applied and traced in a practical way in terms of identifying the shifts in self-perception made by the Coloured students participating in this study. My own research (Nomdo 2006) has drawn on Ivanič (1998) to link selected 'critical experiences' to instances of continuity of identity in high achieving Black South African students' lives at UCT, and reveals that:

The nature of the critical experience is such that it impacts decisively on the way in which one begins to view oneself in a particular context and in relation to others around a particular event. As such, critical experiences are related to the contexts in which they occur and act as important signifiers of facets of an individual's identity. (Nomdo 2006:186)

It can be concluded from the above, that the critical nature of an experience has a profound impact on the way in which future possibilities for ways of being and existing in the world can be assessed and negotiated. Such criticality is influenced by its connection to a dynamic interrelation of contextual references within an individual's life. Let me illustrate this point further by drawing on my earlier examination (Nomdo 2006) of a critical experience in the life of Sipho, a Black South African UCT student from an impoverished, rural township. By drawing on Bourdieu's notion of capital (Bourdieu 1990, 1991; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) I show the extent to which Sipho's poverty stricken upbringing, in other words his lack of economic capital, is instrumental in his decision to pursue a degree in Commerce. For Sipho and his family, a Commerce degree is the means to a well-paying job which will alleviate their financial strains. However, the possibility of achieving this goal is weighed against Sipho's desire to pursue a degree in Drama, which if given the opportunity, would be his first choice of study. This, coupled with Sipho's lack of academic preparation for Commerce

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<sup>13</sup> Zuma's (2013) study of the psycho-social factors that influence the formation of homogenous and heterogeneous relationships amongst UCT students, draws on Bourdieu, and offers useful insights into the types of capital that are valued and devalued by respective groups in the institution.

(which he blames on an inadequate township schooling system) forces him to confront the consequences of his decision to pursue a degree in Commerce.

Ivanič's (1998) concept of 'critical experience' therefore allows us to identify Siphó's entry into university, and especially the lack of continuity between his township schooling experience and his experience in Commerce, as significant. By latching onto this important transitional phase in Siphó's reflective narratives, we see him grappling with his identity as a Commerce student, an identity to which his family affords much status and prestige. At the same time Siphó is negotiating possibilities for a new identity, one as a Drama student, which is not as prestigious as his Commerce identity. His decision to shift from Commerce to Drama constitutes another critical experience, a moment of intense transition from one aspect of self to another.

Ivanič's concept of critical experience and Giddens' concept of 'fateful moment' therefore both foreground severe disruptions to identity, and indicates how this sets in motion a platform for critical self-reflection. Although Ivanič's use of the term 'critical experience' is located as part of the transitioning from one period of the life cycle to another, where existing identities are being added to or being redefined within a range of contextually derived possibilities, it does offer scope for constructing a more nuanced understanding of the social contexts surrounding Giddens' concept of 'fateful moments'. This is particularly relevant in the sense that 'fateful moments' are also located within specific life phases, and it is the particularities attached to the development of a life phase that adds insight to the nature of the crisis surrounding the fateful moment.<sup>14</sup>

Such a focus on the experience of transitioning from school into university for the Coloured students presented in this thesis foregrounds the extent to which the category of race continues to produce hegemonic discourses which inhibit and constrict ways of being amongst students of colour in the South African higher education setting. Zuma (2013, 257) identifies this hegemonic discourse as the 'psycho-social white normativity' operating at universities such as UCT. Black students entering historically White universities have the arduous task of having to negotiate the institutional culture of that setting, and being confronted with an ethos which stresses '[that this is] the way we do things around here' (Jansen 2004:1) adds to their feelings of isolation. In this sense the experiences of

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<sup>14</sup> Reker and Chamberlain's (2000) edited work offers an analysis of existential meaning occurring across and between the stages of the lifespan.

mature students in the British higher education setting which Ivanič writes about, resonates with the experiences of Black students at historically White universities in South Africa, in that both groups experience a sense of dislocation, isolation, insecurity, 'crisis of confidence [and] conflicts of identity' (Ivanič 1998). My earlier study (Nomdo 2006) has illustrated this phenomenon by drawing on Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) notion of 'embodied capital' to emphasise the extent to which non-traditional students' capital is undervalued and stigmatised within the institution.

As a way of unpacking questions about identity, I have made extensive use of reflective essays written by the Coloured participants in this thesis. In grappling with these written reflections I found that Ivanič's (1998) identity concepts of an 'autobiographical self' and a 'discoursal self' allowed for a clearer sense of locating and separating my research participants' constructions of their life-histories from the 'values, beliefs and power relations' that inform the discourses out of which those life-histories emerge. The autobiographical self is that part of an individual's identity which is presented in a text to reveal the individual's sense of origin, their 'life-history'. The autobiographical self is a dynamic self, always in the process of being constructed so as to reflect the changing life-history of the individual. As such, the individual's sense of being is comprised of a dynamic interplay between events that occur and the manner in which the individual experiences and represents these events. Ivanič (1998) relates the autobiographical self to Goffman's notion of '*writer-as-performer*'. It is the latter that constructs the text and 'produces a self-portrait.'

The 'discoursal self' is the 'impression' of herself that the writer wishes to convey to the reader, and contains aspects of the socially constructed 'values, beliefs and power relations' of the context in which the text is embedded. This impression of self, argues Ivanič (1998:25), can be 'multiple' and even 'contradictory'. She relates the discoursal self to Goffman's identification of the '*writer-as-character*,' which Goffman argues is 'the identity which the *writer-as-performer* portrays'. Of prime concern here is how the writer uses her 'voice' in order to sound or come across to the reader in a particular way.

These different perspectives of writer identity have allowed me to identify pertinent aspects in the lives of the Coloured research participants, aspects that have shaped their perceptions of the world. This has given me some access to the ideological positions that impact their identity constructions. This type of focussed approach on written texts can inform the process whereby individuals rewrite

their biographical narratives as a consequence of fateful moments (as can be seen in Figure 2 later on in this section).

## **Managing and maintaining self-identity**

### ***The protective cocoon and reflexivity***

Having established that particular events and experiences have the potential to cause a disruption of self, the question of how we deal with these disruptions also becomes important. In other words, how do we internalise and process these disruptions so as to realign and save the self from a constant state of what Shotter (1993) calls 'identity crises?' It is here that Giddens' analysis of the concept of 'fateful moments' and especially his focus on the consequences thereof, is able to build on Ivanič's (1998) notion of critical experiences. Giddens offers useful insights into the manner in which the individual's disrupted and fractured sense of self and purpose in the world is repaired so that normal everyday social activities and relations can be restored, albeit with a different set of rules and outlooks in mind. It is the manner in which an event or action is able to transform an individual's sense of self into something different than it was before, that becomes important.

As explained earlier, 'fateful moments' are defined by high risk factors and their impact on one's life. Assessing the degree of risk involved in any activity is for the most part a conscious act. The successful managing of these risks is important since it allows the general everyday occurrences and social interactions in our lives to take on an 'uneventful character', which is only made possible through the awareness we have developed of ourselves and our surroundings over a period of time (Giddens 1991). An important part of developing this type of awareness involves being able to trust others, which makes it possible to experience a secure world and a 'coherent sense of self-identity' (Giddens 1991:51). However, Giddens goes on to assert that in a highly modernised world the threat of disruption is always there, and that we are 'perennially at risk' (1991:126). Giddens (1991) argues that our ability to cope with these potential disruptions and to keep them at bay is 'reflexive' in nature, through the 'ordering of self-narratives' which aim 'to preserve a coherent narrative of self-identity' (pp.244, 188). The maintenance of identity therefore necessitates an on-going biographical construction, and must draw on experiences and events in the external world to sustain a coherent narrative of past, present and future selves. The fact that day-to-day happenings are viewed in a non-threatening manner 'presumes' the existence of what Giddens refers to as a 'protective cocoon',

which is able to repel the negative effects of risk taking: 'the protective cocoon of basic trust blocks off ...potentially disturbing happenings which impinge on the individual's life circumstances' (Giddens 1991:126).

This particular biographical narrative of self-identity alluded to above, is therefore both 'fragile' and 'robust': it is fragile since this narrative, which is reflexively created by the individual, is only one of many other possible narratives that could be told; and robust, since the biographical narrative of self-identity which is created is normally strong and enduring enough to repel any threatening disruptions that the individual may encounter in his or her daily life (Giddens 1991:55). Giddens strengthens his claim regarding the significance of biographical narratives by focusing on the importance of the body in this process. He draws on Goffman's (1971) notion of 'easy control' and points out the important function that 'routinised control' of bodily orientation plays in preserving and maintaining the protective cocoon. Giddens asserts that such 'routine control of the body is integral to the very nature of agency and of being accepted (trusted) by others as competent' (1991:57). Such control of the body allows the narrative of self-identity to endure, but at the same time also places the self 'on display' in its interactions and relations with others (Giddens 1991). This ability to produce what Goffman calls 'normal appearances' (cited in Giddens 1991) in the routines of daily life so that they are 'consistent' with the individual's biographical construction of self-identity, is thus crucial for developing and maintaining a sense of ontological security (see also Giddens' later analysis on 'bodily appearance and demeanour' in support of this point). Let us now consider some of the ways in which the protective cocoon deals with potential disruptions to the individual's 'embodied' (Giddens 1991) self.

### ***The dilemmas that threaten the self***

Giddens (1991) uses the term 'dilemmas' to refer to those tensions and potential disruptions that threaten the self. He also points out the importance of resolving these dilemmas so as to be able to maintain a rational self-identity. Giddens (1991) identifies four core dilemmas and examines the types of defences used by the protective cocoon to resolve these dilemmas. The first dilemma concerns the issue of unification versus fragmentation. Unification is viewed in terms of preserving self-identity amidst all the change and disruption that accompanies modernity. On the other hand, the element of choice, of being confronted with considering a multitude of possibilities and contexts, poses a threat of fragmentation of the self. Giddens argues however, that varying contexts can also



be used to shape and mould self-identity in a positive manner, by utilising 'elements from various settings into an integrated narrative' (1991:190). The pathologies that Giddens associates with the above-mentioned dilemma (and the others to follow), can be viewed simply as extreme forms of the more ordinary defence mechanisms. In terms of the above dilemma, Giddens identifies two types of pathologies: firstly, the compulsively rigid person, who links her identity to 'a set of fixed commitments' with no adherence to elements of relativity; and secondly, someone who conforms completely to the demands and requirements of various contexts and becomes completely assimilated, lacking any sense of self-identity and individuality. Here the 'true self is experienced as empty and inauthentic' (ibid:191) and incapable of being completed and fulfilled by the identities that are adopted. Ontological security in these two pathologies is weak and these individuals' sense of self is only anchored by others acknowledging their behaviour (Giddens 1991).

The second dilemma relates to issues of powerlessness versus appropriation. Powerlessness in this context relates to a loss of control in influencing one's surroundings. However, this loss of control can also lead to new forms of control, whereby an individual seeks to gain some form of 'active mastery' over his or her threatening situation so as to be able 'to ride out the trials life presents and overcome them' (Giddens 1991:193). The pathologies associated with this dilemma relate to feelings of complete 'engulfment' which renders the individual helpless against any encroaching crisis. On the other hand, is the individual whose ontological security is derived from a 'fantasy of dominance' in which he or she feels in supreme control of events. Giddens argues that this form of defence is 'brittle' and easily susceptible to engulfment (1991).

The third dilemma is that of authority versus uncertainty. Modernity has tended to minimise traditional authority which has been relegated to exist alongside multiple forms of other authorities, all of whom represent 'an indefinite pluralism of expertise' (Giddens 1991). This third dilemma argues Giddens, is usually overcome 'through a mixture of routine and commitment to a certain lifestyle' (1991:196). We are all forced to choose a lifestyle from the available possibilities, and these lifestyles come to be understood as an 'integrated set of practices which an individual embraces... because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity' (ibid:81). He highlights this sense of security and unity that are fostered through normal appearances and specific adherence to particular lifestyles, which enable the maintenance of a sense of ontological security. At the same time he makes us aware of the risks that could occur and would threaten this complementary

relationship between external displays of identity and the internal self. Giddens (1991) points out that when the harmony is disturbed between the 'performances' of 'normal appearances' which individuals produce and their biographical narratives of self-identity, a separation occurs between the acting out of such performances and the sense of self-identity that exists. The pathologies attached to this dilemma include 'dogmatic authoritarianism' whereby individuals submit to the will and status of an authority figure, whom they then follow blindly. The flip side of this tendency involves individuals who develop 'paranoia or a paralysis of the will', whereby the individual cuts herself off completely from society.

The fourth dilemma concerns the personalised versus the commodified experience. The core pillar of modernisation is capitalism, which renders everything, including identity, tradable and consumable. The tendency of standardising elements of consumption by elevating the status of individualism has had a great impact on 'the project of the self' (Giddens 1991). The project of the self becomes a development of what one consumes, the lifestyle followed or desired, and the public display of wealth and ownership. The pathology flowing out of this commodification of identity is narcissism, which posits 'appearance as the prime arbiter of value' (1991:200).<sup>15</sup>

It is against the backdrop of these dilemma's that Giddens (1991:201) alerts us to the 'looming threat of *personal meaninglessness*'. The latter results from a context in which there is a 'sequestration of experience' in which things like sexual behaviour and sexuality have been reduced to the sex act only, without any connections to the broader 'cosmic processes of life and death' (ibid:206). Mastery over one's life, in a controlled and predictable social and physical world which is being buffered by the certainty and accuracy of knowledge, has restricted the meaning of life to purely internal points of reference. Death in this instance epitomises a complete lack of control, and the separation of death from elements of life and birth has raised important questions about existence and the meaning of life. A move to external points of reference, through religious and spiritual phenomena, has thus endured within the processes of rapid change, control, and standardisation of existence brought about by modernity. Contrary to institutions of modernisation, what religion and spirituality provide are 'moral frameworks' where human agency and issues related to the meaning of existence

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<sup>15</sup> See also Eze's (2011) article where he examines the phenomenon of identity commodification amongst Black immigrants in the township of Soweto in South Africa. He unpacks the notion of 'identity capitalism' through the concept of 'social capital', understood as the accumulation of social credit that functions to affirm subjectivity, and by extension, being human. He offers a useful historical overview and critique of the commodification and 'colonisation of subjectivity' within the South African context.

are addressed. Giddens (1991) asserts that the basic notions of morality and trust need to operate in meaningful ways alongside and in combination with the routines that make up daily life, so as to be able to maintain a sense of ontological security. This is important for understanding the extent of the impact of a fateful moment, since an individual faced with such a moment may find that a consideration of risk and possible forms of action that are restricted to 'technical parameters', may not be enough to re-establish a sense of security and belonging in the world.

Of importance here, is that the dilemma's and defences outlined by Giddens, take shape later in life, and are derived from the circumstances that are put into play by late modernity. The nature of the basic mantle of trust established by individuals' at a young age also seems to be susceptible to the conditions of late modernity, since the impact on the parents caught up in these conditions will influence child-rearing practices. This can be seen for example amongst parents caught up in 'identity capitalism', a term used to indicate that 'one's access to socio-economic privileges determines one's subjectivity' (Eze 2011:305). These parents, asserts Eze, will rear their children in a very particular way. As such, the importance of developing a sense of trust is related to the feelings of security that individuals carry into the world at a later stage.

### **Some critical concerns**

In Giddens' (1991:52) view, our relationships with others and their reactions to us are important for "the sustaining of an 'observable/accountable' world", even though such relationships cannot always be depended upon with absolute certainty. When the 'orderliness' of everyday interactions is interrupted, it gives rise to elements of tension and anxiety. Here Giddens' (1990; 1991) notion of the 'reflexive project' as a mechanism for coping with life's stresses, is useful for locating the specificity of agency in maintaining a sense of 'self' through the progression of one's life. His notions of the 'reflexive project of self' and 'fateful moments' have received much attention in the work of Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman (1993) in their attempt to improve on lifespan identity theory. They summarise Giddens' (1991) 'reflexive project of the self' as follows:

For Giddens, 'the self' must be seen as the focus of an ongoing dialogue that individuals sustain with themselves in relation to their changing life experiences ... any account of who we are will need to respond to continuously evolving circumstances and how we align ourselves in relation to them.  
(Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman 1993:xiv)

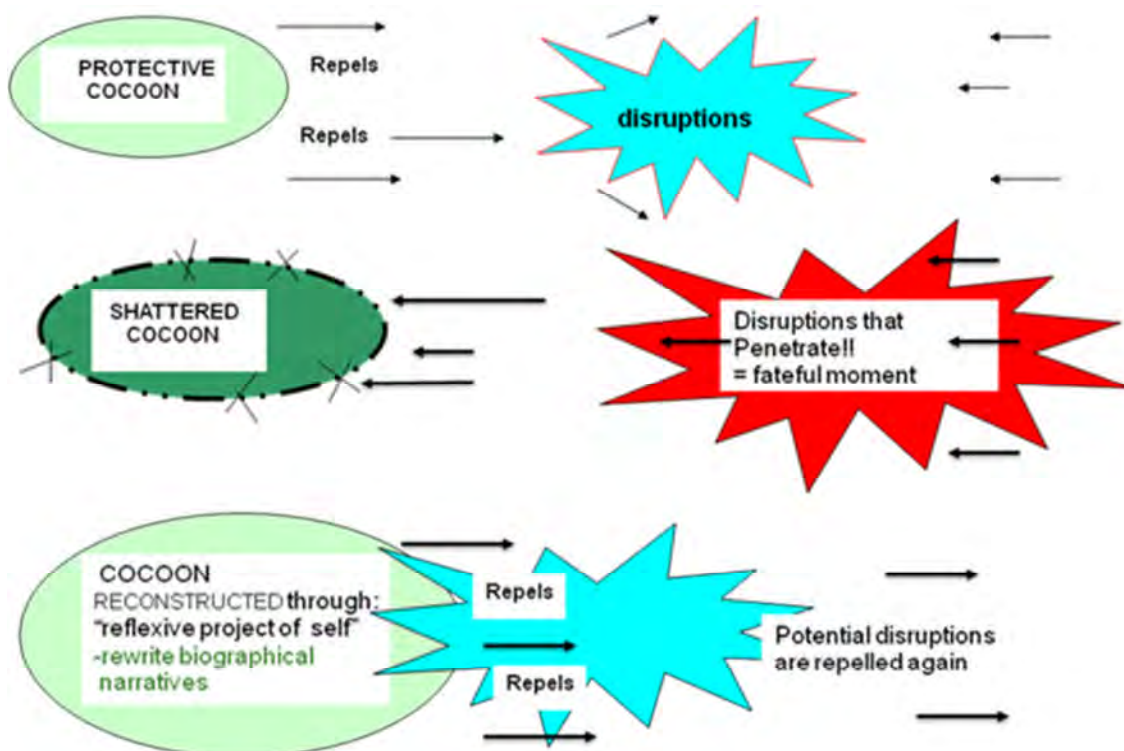
In Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman's (1993) reading of Giddens' 'reflexive project', they draw specific attention to the process of continuity that engulfs the self in Giddens' analysis of identity. For Giddens this search for continuity in identity involves the constant revision of biographical narratives:

The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continually revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice...

(Giddens 1991:5)

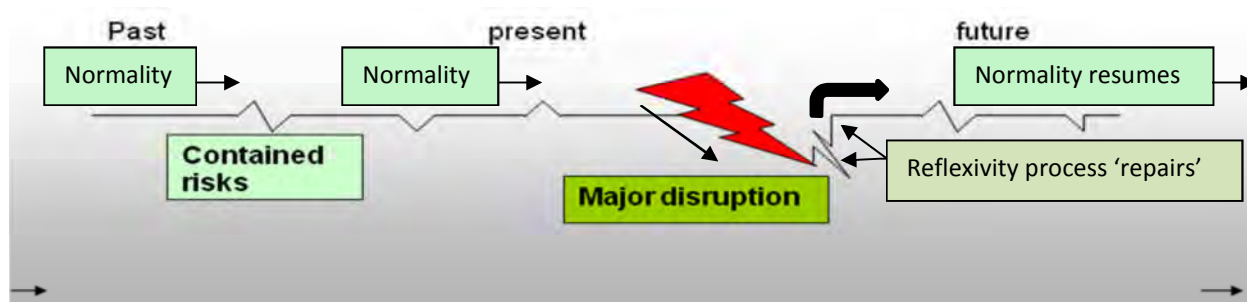
The essence of what is being alluded to above can be illustrated visually as follows; Figure 1 represents the ability of the cocoon to absorb and repel some of the everyday risks through routine activities, so that an individual's sense of self-identity remains intact, thereby enabling a continuity of normality. At times the cocoon that houses the self is shattered due to the intensity of a particular experience or event. At such times the individual's 'internal referential systems' (Giddens 1991) cannot rationalise the experience. This disruption constitutes a 'fateful moment', and throws the vulnerable self into a state of turmoil and confusion, since the buffer created by the cocoon is no longer intact. The third level in fig.1 thus indicates how the cocoon is able to reconstruct itself through a reflexive process, in which the biographical narrative, indicated by Figure 2, is rewritten to account for the fateful moment, thereby returning the sense of self on the path of normalcy again.

**Figure 1**



**The mechanism used by one's sense of self to manage risk**

Figure 2



**Repairing major disruptions to the protective cocoon by rewriting the biographical narrative**

Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman (1993:xiv-xv) conclude from the above that “For Giddens the updating of the ‘biographical narrative’... is very clearly a lifelong process... *not* to be equated with a fixed and orderly progression through generational stages”.<sup>16</sup> The aforementioned authors thus show how Giddens questions the dominant tradition of lifespan development, which is premised on ‘a fixed and orderly progression’. Giddens argues instead that the strong links between the life cycle and the process of renewal that sustained pre-modern societies are in fact lost in contexts of high modernity ‘where practices are repeated only in so far as they are reflexively justifiable’ (Giddens 1991 cited in Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman 1993:xv). In their consideration of Giddens’ work in relation to lifespan identity theory, these authors disagree with Giddens and assert that there are certain domains in contemporary contexts (such as child rearing and religious practices) that do in fact still ‘predetermine generational and lifespan positions... and constrain... reflexive self-determination’ (ibid:xvi). They therefore critique the level of surety that Giddens’ attaches to the ‘rigidity of traditional orders and the flexibility of current ones’ (Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman (1993:xvi).

Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman (1993) also question the *extent* of the involvement of self in the ‘reflexive activity’ process outlined by Giddens. They assert that the act of ‘interrogating’ the self is not part of normal, everyday activity and is most likely to occur only through the onset of very

<sup>16</sup> This fits in with narrative identity theory used in personality psychology, which shows how memories that ‘fit neatly into the existing story line’ are able to provide ‘identity continuity, whereas others challenge the story line and invite identity questioning and transformation’ (McAdams 1985 cited in Pals 2006:1081).

specific types of experiences such as death; threats; achievements; and recognition of lifespan boundaries, which then act as ‘experiential triggers’ (ibid:xvii) for the reflexive project.

A close reading of Giddens (1991) however, suggests that his references to ‘inconsequential’ and ‘highly consequential and problematic’ events (which I have touched on earlier), would in fact address Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman’s (1993) concerns raised above. Giddens’ analysis does signal out specific events that act as a stimulus for self-reflexive activity, which would fall under his categorisation of ‘highly consequential and problematic’ events. However, his analysis of ‘inconsequential events’ is an indication of less disruptive forces which are tied up in routines of daily living and which can easily be accommodated, remedied and even tolerated by individuals to the extent that such disruptions pose no existential threat. The fact that these lesser disruptive forces are rendered non-threatening means that individuals would have come to that decision through some form of self-reflexive activity. The self is therefore also involved in reflexive activity in normal everyday routines, and is not limited to the more drastic and profound experiences as alluded to by Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman (1993). Addressing the issue of *the extent* of the self’s involvement in reflexive activity is therefore relative to the nature and level of intensity of the disruptive experience that enters the individual’s daily routine. Also, since the critique levelled against Giddens concerns *the extent* to which the self is involved in the reflexive process and not the reflexive act itself, we can conclude that the ‘reflective project of the self’ can be regarded as a valid mechanism for maintaining a sense of continuity in the world today.

Giddens’ concept of ‘fateful moment’ and its impact on the ‘protective cocoon’, which houses ontological security, has also come under review. Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman’s (1993) reference to the ‘trigger’ experiences alluded to earlier, shares some familiarity with Giddens’ (1991) conceptual development of ‘fateful moments’ and Ivanič’s (1998) understanding of ‘critical experiences’. In the use of each of these terms there is an element of disruption that threatens the consistency and continuity of identity that individuals have maintained up to that point. In their attempt to improve upon Giddens’ analysis, Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman (1993) observe that Giddens’ notion of ‘fateful moments’ can be bolstered by ‘a contextually sensitive account’ of the types of circumstances that give rise to such moments. Such contextual accounts, these authors argue, need to relay the processes whereby we are able to ‘recognize’ moments as being ‘fateful’. For these authors the major source of contention in Giddens’ work is the latter’s lack of attention to

‘the discursive *means* by which identity formations are achieved consistently across the lifespan’ (Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman 1993).

Through her use of Giddens’ (1991) reflexive project, however, Ivanič (1998) presents another dimension to Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman’s (1993) demand for a more discursive account of identity formation. Like the aforementioned authors, Ivanič (1998) also incorporates aspects of lifespan identity theory, and in doing so she manages to draw quite strongly on Giddens’ (1991) notion of the ‘reflexive project of the self’, understood as that which is sustained through the constant revision of ‘biographical narratives’. Ivanič (1998) claims that this particular understanding of the self is a ‘powerful way of conceptualising continuity and change’ in the identity construction process. She elaborates in the following manner on Giddens’ understanding that the reflexive project of the self is constantly being revised:

It locates identity in events and experience, rather than reifying it as a quality or attribute. Further, the self consists not of a person’s life-history, but of the *interpretation* they are putting on their life story. The self is in this way doubly socially constructed: both by the socially constrained nature of the experience itself, and by the social shaping of the interpretation. (Ivanič 1998:16)

Ivanič (1998) therefore asserts that the act of writing, through its very nature, is able to contribute quite effectively to the ‘reflexive project of the self’. Furthermore the criticism that Giddens (1991) lacks an account for the ‘*consistency of self*’ (Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman 1993:xvii) is not entirely convincing since Giddens’ (1991) incorporation of Goffman’s idea of ‘*Umwelt*’, as that which relates to an individual’s awareness of potential dangers (discussed in more detail below), does address such concerns. Giddens (1991) states that the physical and psychological sense of ease which accompanies the way in which individuals conduct daily tasks is achieved through developing routines that become a familiar and predictable aspect of life. This familiarity and predictability operates in such a way that it blocks out the potential risks that individuals face daily, such as possibly being run over by a car. The sense of normality that individuals experience is captured by the term ‘*Umwelt*’, which signals an individual’s ability to have an awareness of herself and her present surroundings. But ‘*Umwelt*’ also ‘extends over... time and space’ (ibid:127) so as to allow individuals to move from past to future orientations without having an impending sense of doom. The routine, ‘non-consequential’ nature of events creates a sense of trust in the world which takes cognisance of an individual’s ‘current activities and projects for the future’ (Giddens 1991:129). Giddens’ analysis

does therefore show how individuals are able to develop a continual and constant sense of self in the world.

Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman's critique of Giddens' work has also rendered some positive results in getting them to generate insightful questions for taking their own theorising of lifespan identity forward. For example, Giddens' analysis of selfhood and reflexivity from traditional to modern settings has now forced lifespan identity theorists 'to account for how some *consistency* of the self is achieved' (Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman's 1993:xvii). In this thesis, I also offer a 'contextually sensitive account' of the origins, impact and consequences of 'fateful moments' in order to unpack and interrogate Giddens' analysis of self and reflexivity in the construction of identity. Unlike Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman however, my focus is not on conducting a discourse analysis. Rather, I wish to engage in an-depth analysis of the content of my case-study data, so as to offer additional insights into Giddens' unpacking of the transformational aspects of self-identity in the modern world.

I would like to draw on my (Nomdo 2006) examination of Siphos life once again to illustrate this point further. As explained earlier, Siphos is confronted with the dire reality of his choices. Siphos protective cocoon — comprised of his sense of achievement at his Black township school, the trust and confidence of his teachers and parents in his abilities, and his own anticipation of success — has been shattered. In other words his social capital, the social credits that he has previously accumulated, has been 'devalued' (Eze 2011) in the Commerce faculty:

It was all about getting a degree for a better job, there was an irrelevance in what I was studying... I remember my first two weeks, in my room, I went to cry, every day, every day, it was painful, you know.  
(Siphos, cited in Nomdo 2006:191)

What is revealed here is Siphos intense grappling with finding meaning in what he was studying. What he experiences is a crisis pertaining to the way in which he thinks of himself as being in the world (as alluded to earlier by Shotter 1993). In the above extract Siphos, to echo Giddens' (1991) earlier sentiment, 'stands, as it were, at a crossroads in his existence' where his entire world has been cast into turmoil. Through questioning the very meaning of his life, he finds himself at the heart of an existential crisis, and it is the latter that adds another dimension to the issue of lifespan identity discussed earlier. The existential issue goes beyond recognising and adopting alternative possibilities for self-hood, and deals with the actual manner in which individuals experience and represent the



process of change and transformation of the self. In other words, what is at stake is how this change in self-identity and expression impacts their 'embeddedness' (Corrie and Milton 2000) in the world, their sense of being, from which they draw meaning for their existence.

Giddens' identification of the dilemma of powerlessness versus appropriation is evident in Sipho's case above, in that he finds himself powerlessness in trying to exert any influence over the context he is confronted with in the Commerce Faculty. He experiences feelings of 'engulfment' and enters into a space which Giddens (1991) earlier described as 'personal meaninglessness'. Sipho is left to decide whether or not to continue with Commerce or to follow his passion to do Drama. His choice to pursue studies in the Dramatic Arts is therefore also not without risk. However, the consequences of this choice turn out to be quite positive for Sipho who collects a number of accolades along the way, including various awards for performance, and even television appearances.<sup>17</sup> Sipho is therefore able to restore the shattered cocoon through interpreting his failure in Commerce in light of his success in Drama. In terms of Giddens' identification of the dilemma of unification versus fragmentation, Sipho is able to unify and preserve a sense of self-identity amidst all the disruptions that he experiences. He is able to combine 'elements from various settings into an integrated narrative' (1991). He can thus validate his choice in taking Drama, having found a home for his capital and a true connectedness with the world. This is particularly important since Commerce signalled a clash between the types of capital that Sipho possessed on the one hand and the types of capital that Commerce required for success in the field on the other. His acquisition of the identity of a successful Drama student thus ensures his sense of continuity in the world. He has successfully developed 'a right to speak' and thereby 'commands reception' (Pierce, 1995). Sipho, now writing from the perspective of a Black Drama student and artist, is able to locate himself in the following way:

artists have to break free from the romantic notion of individuality as the essence of the artist's creative impulse and recognise that art is a profession that has to fulfil a social role. They need to be made to understand that over indulgence in individuality is a social escape and a reflection of excessive ego. (Sipho, cited in Nomdo 2006:189)

I feel I've been clouded by other things. There's a lot... I need to unlearn... Drama gives me the physical ability to recreate myself... (Sipho, cited in Nomdo 2006:200)

A few important observations can be made with respect to the above extracts, which traces Sipho's journey from Commerce to being a Drama student. What stands out in Sipho's story is a

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<sup>17</sup> Sipho made an appearance on 'Back Stage', a local South African television drama series and also appeared on a local 'Niknacks' chip advertisement.

reconceptualisation of fateful moments as not only a crisis, but also as a challenge and opportunity. Two languages seem to operate alongside each other in Sipho's narrative here: the one is a language of crisis in which fateful moments, influenced by apartheid, produce isolation, marginalisation and despair; the other is a language of resilience and adaptability which indicates the creativity and movement entailed in negotiating culture, class and racial disjuncture. Walsh and Lantz's (2007) study of short-term existential interventions encapsulates this understanding of crisis when they state: 'An existential crisis is dangerous because it often feels overwhelming, but it is an opportunity because it often forces us to look for strengths, meanings, and solutions that are outside of our normal range of awareness' (2007:1). This has some resonance with Erikson's (1968) unpacking of identity, in which he redefines the term 'crisis' as something generative, thereby shifting it away from the doom and gloom meanings traditionally associated with it. Erikson states that in the analysis of identity construction, 'crisis' can be understood as that which signals 'a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation' (1968:16).

### **Establishing a basis for exploring Coloured identity**

Black African students such as Sipho above, have adaptive abilities and resources, which by all accounts, are already part of rural and Black African township cultures. This much has already been established in Nomdo (2006), the pilot study for this thesis. What is embarked upon in this present study therefore, is an attempt at identifying the extent to which the resources, the social capital that my Coloured research participants bring into the UCT space, allows them to adapt and feel at home. What is apparent in this process, is that the very nature of 'Colouredness' itself presents somewhat of a conundrum, first and foremost for the Coloured students themselves. This is especially so since the classification of 'Coloured' within the South African context continues to be a contentious and loaded term, distinct in many ways from the everyday use of the term 'Black'. It is the contentious nature of the 'Coloured' label and the manner in which those classified as such grapple with their own sense of belonging in the new democratic SA, that makes Coloured identity such a rich and viable site for exploring deeper connections between the nature of the self and the process of identity transformation in which it is intricately implicated. The 'fateful moment' concept thus offers us an unique opportunity to glimpse at how Colouredness is represented at its core.

***‘What’s in a name?’ Labelling and the politics of being Coloured in a democratic SA***

The dynamics of being recognised as belonging to a particular racial grouping carries much significance in SA. During apartheid, being born into a Coloured or Black African family carried with it varying degrees of stigmatisation that was publically reinforced through the attitudes and practices that underlined unequal and hierarchical social relations. Much has been written on the issue of apartheid<sup>18</sup> and the extent to which its effects on various group identities have continued to sour social relations between the South African populace in the new democratic setting.<sup>19</sup> Stereotypical notions of group identity and allegiances to such identities have been carried down from generation to generation making it extremely difficult to incorporate aspects of change geared towards fostering new and more harmonious types of inter-group relations.

The type of rigidity in the practices and attitudes alluded to above, is captured quite succinctly in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, which I will draw on briefly to offer some insights into the issue of Coloured identity. The play offers a few important insights (II, ii:1-2) into the constraining nature of an inherited identity. Juliet’s famous utterance of ‘What’s in a name?’ has particular significance for the three Coloured students presented here. This is especially the case since Romeo and Juliet’s family feud is perpetuated through their respective family names, and is something they cannot escape, other than through death. The students presented here also seek to escape, or at the very least, confront the restrictive nature of their Coloured identities and the extent to which this has predetermined their sense of who they are and can be. Therefore, in answer to Juliet’s question, we find that there *is in fact* much in a name: naming and labelling something gives it a place in the universe, a home, a sense of belonging and a sense of where it fits in relation to other things. Naming something causes it to come into existence; it creates an identity through which something can be recognised and categorised. But this very process is also accompanied by restrictions, in that when something is named or labelled, the possibility of it being anything else becomes limited or ceases altogether. Acts of naming and labelling therefore carry with it both an enabling and restrictive function. Viewing the process of labelling in this way is useful for navigating the present study being undertaken here. What is apparent is the way in which the use of the label ‘Coloured’ within the South African context of inter-group relations and nation-building has continued to be a disputed and contested identity.

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<sup>18</sup> See for example Neame (1962), Posel (1991), Maylam (2001), and Giliomee and Mbenga (2007).

<sup>19</sup> For insight into this see James, Caliguire and Cullinan’s (1996); Erasmus’s (2001) and Adhikari (2005, 2009).

The apartheid imposed racial classification of 'Coloured' onto a minority sector of the South African populace, who were then used to a large extent as a buffer between White privilege and African disenfranchisement, has therefore created a Coloured identity framed by ambiguity, ambivalence and discontentment. This has made the question of 'Who am I?' a difficult and challenging endeavour for many Coloureds grappling with the meaning of democracy in SA today. This seemingly simple question conceals a much deeper, almost primal quest for discovering the meaning of one's existence: It is a question that goes beyond simply understanding the historical origins of those classified as Coloured in SA;<sup>20</sup> it goes beyond trying to unpack how this label of Coloured identity has been used and manipulated by the apparatus of the apartheid state, and how it came to be that Coloureds themselves were complicit in this process of establishing a separate identity to fellow Africans;<sup>21</sup> it moves us past some of the recent and very influential attempts at trying to decipher and reconstruct the symbolic meanings that have come to be associated with the social markers of Colouredness, in relation to other markers of race in SA;<sup>22</sup> it is a question that goes even deeper than some of the recent psycho-analytical research<sup>23</sup> dealing with the reflective recollections of displaced Coloured communities grappling with the trauma of apartheid-imposed forced removals.<sup>24</sup> The question of 'Who am I?' as posed by the Coloured research participants in this thesis is concerned instead, with the nature of being human. It is a question that embodies the search for personal

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<sup>20</sup> Since the core focus of this thesis is on the 'fateful moment' concept and not on Coloured identity per se, I have not included an extensive review of the literature on Coloured identity in this chapter. Instead, I want to indicate, although quite brief, the richness that Coloured identity offers as a site of contestation for the application of the 'fateful moment concept'. My review of the literature on Coloured identity is to a large extent limited to the footnotes, and although not extensive, the ideas of contestation, marginality, relative privilege and displacement that reside in Coloured identity is what I wish to emphasise here. For more insight see Goldin's (1987) book in which he offers a brief but insightful overview of some of the leading literature dealing with the historical development of Coloured identity in SA;

<sup>21</sup> Goldin's (1987) analysis looks at the growth of Coloured political identity and its links with government's Coloured labour preference policies, which he argues was part of government's plans to establish a 'distinct Coloured identity'. Also see Adhikari (2005) and contributions to his (2009) edited volume where emphasis is placed on the 'complicity' of Coloureds in structuring the form that Coloured identity took;

<sup>22</sup> In her edited volume, Zimitri Erasmus (2001:22) argues that Coloured identity must be viewed as a 'creolised cultural identity' that has been historically shaped through its interactions with White domination and African subordination.

<sup>23</sup> See also some of the theoretical frameworks in personality psychology which views narrative identity as something that 'is made up of memories of emotionally significant experiences that are interpreted to contain self-defining meaning and integrated into the broader themes and patterns that comprise the life story as a whole' (Pals 2006:1081; also see Singer & Blagov [2004] and Singer [2004]).

<sup>24</sup> See the article by Trotter (2009). Trotter's emphasis on the 'trauma of eviction' is an important step in trying to explore the more emotive and psychological aspects of forced removals suffered by the Coloured community. He identifies a 'salience' in the narratives of Coloured evictees that extends beyond socio-political and economic imperatives (pp. 49-52). He uses these evictee narratives about a single event, viz. forced removals, to show how collective nostalgia was used to unify Coloured experiences, thereby enabling healing and a renewed sense of identity amongst evicted communities. I depart from Trotter by identifying individual instances of trauma in the lives of the research participants, and how the notion of Colouredness impacts their journey towards a renewed sense of self and wholeness in a new democratic SA.

meaning and purpose in life within a changing socio-political South African landscape trying to adjust to the globalising effects of late modernity.

## **SECTION 2**

### **Overlaps in the form and function of fateful moment terminology: Surveying the literature**

#### **Overview**

In the process of pursuing the appropriate terminology to describe the nature and extent of the identity changes undergone by the research participants, I have drawn on discussions with various colleagues whose research relates to issues of race, identity, equity, student development, academic literacies and service-learning projects. These discussions have afforded valuable insights into the problematising of race and identity concepts and their overlaps with issues of class, social and cultural locations, institutional culture, and the development of perceptions of belonging amongst university students. During these engagements with colleagues, a number of the concepts that are discussed in this chapter were interrogated. I have used these engagements as a guide for defending and selecting Giddens' (1991) notion of a 'fateful moment' as the core concept underlining the identity transformation processes identified in the Coloured students in this thesis.

In this section I build on some of the debates raised in Section 1 of this chapter, concerning the ways in which various terms associated with change and identity have been used in different contexts. In what follows I continue to explore some of the philosophical positions responsible for the overlaps and variations in the identity transformation terminology used by various authors in the literature. In doing so I hope to expand and substantiate Giddens' existentialist notion of a 'fateful moment' in so far as it deals with broad issues concerning the nature of identity transformations and the subsequent impact thereof on the individual's sense authenticity, location and cohesive embeddedness in the world.

#### **Crossing theoretical paradigms: an eclectic approach**

Thus far Giddens' (1991) analysis has ascertained that modernity has increased the complexities of everyday life. He points out that many of our everyday engagements (work, parenthood, friendships, relationships, travel) involve elements of risk. Giddens (1991) points out that it is our ability to feel at 'ease' and to avoid taking unnecessary risks in our daily routines derives from the familiarity of the routines we have acquired through the socialisation process. As part of this process individuals learn to cope with the demands of life, developing the necessary skills to minimise or avoid risky situations so as to produce a semblance of normality and continuity in their daily existence. In accepting the importance of being able to repel disruptions and being able to maintain a sense of continuity when such disruptions do occur, it is useful to dwell a bit more on the interpretive mechanisms we use to extract different levels of meaning from our experiences. Earlier I drew on Ivanič's (1998) analysis of identity construction within mature students writing. I would like to maintain this focus on mature students and their identity construction process by having a closer look at Mezirow's (1990; 1991) studies on how transformation takes place in adult learners, and Travisano's (1970) analysis of the process of identity conversion. This type of comparative analysis will grant more insight into the type of identity transformation process that comprises Giddens' work.

#### ***(a) Mezirow's transformation of meaning perspectives in the lifeworld***

Mezirow's (1991) exploration into how adult learners create, approach, assess and reconceptualise the meaning of their experiences is an attempt to develop a learning theory that will create relevant and compatible practices within the adult education context. Mezirow aims to provide adult educators with an understanding of how the 'frames of reference' used to construct meaning are sometimes altered or even transformed within the adult learning process. He identifies the constructivist basis of this type of transformation theory as that which emphasises the manner in which adults make sense of their experiences. Mezirow (1991) identifies a 'transformative learning experience' as a tool with which to assist adults in identifying and reconceptualising certain barriers in their prior learning. Such recognition enables adults to learn more proficiently.

Mezirow (1991) asserts that the widespread change and great variety of choice ushered in by modernity has made 'old ways of knowing' amongst adults, inadequate for comprehending meaning and asserting control over their lived circumstances. Within this transitioning phase there exists a lack of traditional authority, which results in the creation of 'liminal spaces' for 'the negotiation of new meanings and the creation of new forms of authority' (Bowers cited in Mezirow 1991:3). The

individual engaged in such a negotiation process has to learn how to do so in a critically reflective manner, in order to gain and grow from the experience. The recognition that meaning perspectives are created often ‘uncritically’ and without much reflection, underlines the core feature of an approach to adult learning, which is informed by ‘constructivist transformation theory’. Meaning systems have a filtering process which manages the manner in which we receive and process information. This is important in that it actually lessens the extent of our ‘awareness’ of actual events so as to reduce levels of anxiety, thereby ‘creating a zone of blocked attention and self-deception’ (1991:5). Some overlaps with Giddens’ notion of ‘inconsequential’ moments, which are things that are dealt with in a matter-of-fact manner, seem to be present here. In Mezirow’s (1991) analyses, the result of this blocking action is that certain approaches to learning, viewing, valuing and believing come to be accepted without question through the socialisation process. In psychological terms, this blocking action results in ‘rigid and inflexible’ beliefs (as in the example of Romeo and Juliet’s family feud referred to earlier), which by their fixed nature are viewed as having undergone a process of ‘sedimentation’ (Strasser and Strasser 1997 cited in Corrie and Milton 2000:10).

A core feature of adult learning therefore rests on the ability of creating contexts in which adults are able to reflect critically on their prior learning experiences, and on the assumptions underlining those experiences. The purpose behind this type of reflective practice is to help adult learners ascertain the extent to which prior learning assumptions can be either validated, or alternatively, recognised as possible stumbling blocks to further learning and enrichment. An example of this type of approach is adopted by Bozalek et al.’s (2014) comparative study, which draws on a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ framework to unpack the very complex issue of ‘difference’ within the South African higher education context. The authors draw on students from the University of Stellenbosch (SU, a historically White university) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC, a historically Black university), with the aim of getting them to engage critically with their own perceptions of difference and the ways in which such perceptions have translated into discriminatory behaviour.<sup>25</sup> Students enter an uncomfortable space in which they come to realise their own biases, and once this is acknowledged there is an attempt to reconstruct these views into ones which are more inclusive and more accepting of the ‘other’. The act of reconciling with oneself thus becomes a precursor to adopting new and meaningful ways of engaging with the world. Mezirow’s focus on critical reflection

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<sup>25</sup> As a precursor to Bozalek et al.’s edited volume, see the contributions to Leibowitz et al.’s (2012) edited volume, which also involves collaboration between SU and UWC. Leibowitz et al. examines the notions of self, identity and community as a way of fostering citizenship in the South African democratic higher educational landscape.

as a stimulus for transformative learning therefore carries much merit in that it allows us to emphasise the cognitive dimension of Giddens' conceptual basis, particularly with respect to issues of reflexivity and the rewriting of the biographical narrative, alluded to earlier in this chapter.

Mezirow identifies a two dimensional model of meaning making: meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. The former is comprised of 'sets of related and habitual expectations governing if-then, cause-effect, and category relationships' (food satisfies hunger; driving gets us to our destination sooner than walking and so forth) (1990:2). Meaning perspectives are the more complex, abstract components of the meaning making process, and are comprised of 'higher-order schemata, theories, presuppositions, beliefs... and evaluations' (such as those involved in familiar role relationships, e.g. father-son and doctor-patient) (ibid). Meaning schemes 'are habitual, implicit *rules* for interpreting,' whereas meaning perspectives 'involve the application of habits of expectation to objects or events to form an interpretation' (ibid). As such, meaning schemes provide us with tools to ascertain value and to structure belief. What we have on the one hand therefore, are '*rules* for interpreting' and on the other '*principles* for interpreting'. Together these two schemes serve to characterise our 'horizons of expectation' which are linked to our sustained ability to understand and communicate effectively (Berkson and Wettersten cited in Mezirow 1990). Mezirow (1990:1) asserts that a core part of the meaning making process involves the act of reflection, which helps individuals 'to correct distortions in [their] beliefs and errors in problem solving'. He differentiates between 'reflection' and 'critical reflection', and states the latter 'involves a critique of the presuppositions' underlining individuals' beliefs (ibid). He states that these acts of reflection and the possibilities it offers for transforming the meaning making process amongst adult learners, become severely hampered when confronted with meaning perspectives that were deeply developed and intensely reinforced during childhood socialisation. These meaning perspectives become ingrained in 'habits of expectation' which are very resistant to change (Mezirow 1990). When an adult with ingrained 'habits of expectation' is faced with a threatening experience which tends to challenge these 'habits of expectation', the tendency is 'to block it out or resort to psychological defense mechanisms to provide a more compatible interpretation' (p.4). The 'defense mechanism' alluded to here is not entirely a rational activity, since it represents in most psychological theories, an unconscious response. It must be noted however, that Mezirow still remains distinct from Giddens here, in that Mezirow resorts to quite a minimal and different use of the unconscious, compared to what Giddens is doing. Mezirow therefore retains much more of a cognitive focus, one in which the individual



makes a conscious choice to follow a particular path. The decision made is viewed in relation to prior learning so as to acquire a degree of justification. There is therefore a process of rationalising that is also involved here. Unlike Giddens (1991), Mezirow tends to offer a cognitive response to unpacking the 'meaning of life', where the latter is viewed in relation to a problem that needs to be solved, in a conscious, rational and analytical manner (1990:5). For Giddens the question related to 'the meaning of life' is an existential problem, one involving high levels of emotion and anxiety about one's entire state of being.

As mentioned, the ability of the 'protective cocoon' to repel danger and to create a non-threatening environment of engagement is important for maintaining a necessary element of resilience in our identities. In a similar fashion Mezirow (1991) asserts that transformations of 'meaning schemes' are normal everyday occurrences that simply require corrective strategies (such as in the case of 'inconsequential' moments mentioned earlier), that would not, in Giddens' (1991) terms, drastically affect the 'protective cocoon'. Without such a measure of resilience, our sense of self-identity will continuously be in a state of traumatic flux, incapable of action, resulting in what Laing (1965 cited in Giddens 1991:53) refers to as 'inner deadness'. Such an individual is completely vulnerable to the risks that threaten to disable any sense of established routine made possible by the protective cocoon. The protective cocoon, when related to Mezirow's interpretive schemes, seems to encompass an element of the 'horizons of expectation' that these schemes give rise to. In light of these defensive measures, the protective cocoon has what I would call, *a risk management portfolio*, which enables and facilitates successful and meaningful interactions with the world. The protective cocoon relates to the aforementioned ability of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives in blocking off possible threats so that routine activities can continue. However, the site of impact and the nature of the consequences that these threats produce are different for the protective cocoon. In Mezirow's (1990) model the elimination of threats concerns the maintaining of established cognitive modes of interpreting, assessing and validating experience, and having to resort to 'psychological defense mechanisms' when needed, so that a rational learning outcome is achieved. For Giddens, the threats which are blocked by the protective cocoon, allows the individual to maintain emotional stability. This allows for a coherent and positive sense of self in the world, a self which is ontologically secure. In Giddens' analysis he elaborates on this concept of 'protective cocoon' by relating it to Goffman's idea of '*Umwelt*'. Giddens defines '*Umwelt*' as:

a core of (accomplished) normalcy with which individuals and groups surround themselves... which enframe the individual's life... The *Umwelt* is a 'moving' world of normalcy which the individual takes around from situation to situation. (1991:127-128)

Giddens' (1991:129) assessment of *Umwelt* is in direct relation to the function of the 'protective cocoon' which he argues serves as 'the *mantle of trust that makes possible the sustaining of a viable Umwelt*'. However, it has already been established that despite the existence of these efficient protective mechanisms, intrusions into the *Umwelt* do occur, and manifest themselves as 'cause for alarm', such as illness or disease, anxieties about examinations or a driving test, or the death of a loved one. The severity of the intrusion can differ, but as Giddens explains, the most severe intrusions 'are those where alarms coincide with consequential changes – fateful moments' (Giddens 1991:131). Mezirow's (1990; 1991) analysis of assessing the degree of transformation that can occur in adult learning through a process of critical reflection is insightful here.

Drawing on Wildemeersch and Leirman's (1988) analysis of the phenomenological concept of 'lifeworld',<sup>26</sup> Mezirow (1991) asserts the extent to which lifeworld enables routine actions to be carried out in everyday life in a non-threatening way, so that a sense of normality prevails. There does seem to be an overlap in meaning and function between the concepts of 'lifeworld' and 'Umwelt' here. I noted earlier that transformations of 'meaning schemes' are routine in nature and non-threatening while transformations in 'meaning perspectives' are viewed as being much more drastic (Mezirow 1991). Mezirow (1990) argues that perspective transformation comes about as a result of a build-up of transformed meaning schemes in which individuals grapple with recurring difficulties in relation to the interpretation of their role within specific contexts. He draws on the concept of 'lifeworld' to explain how the process of transformation comes about. Three lifeworld stages have been identified within the process of transformation. Firstly there exists a 'self-evident lifeworld', comprising a type of dialogue that creates a sense of location and security in the world and which provides a sense of normality in everyday actions. The second stage is the 'threatened lifeworld', whereby inconsistencies and a lack of congruence between the self-evident lifeworld and the occurrence of a particular 'disorientating dilemma' (Mezirow 1991) comes to the fore. The type of dialogue operating within this threatened lifeworld is referred to as 'transactional dialogue', where different perspectives are examined and evaluated in light of the present dilemma, so as to

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<sup>26</sup> In terms of the historical development of phenomenology, the concept of the 'lifeworld' was introduced by Husserl in 1970 and later taken forward in the work of Alfred Schutz, whose insights impacted the work of Martin Heidegger, whose work I also draw on. For a brief insight see Barber (2014).

inform a decision about whether or not to invest in the new perspective. Any drastic event that calls into question those perspectives and 'personal values' that ground us, can 'threaten our very sense of self' (Mezirow 1991:168). In Giddens' analysis, this 'disorientating dilemma' would represent a situation which appears to be 'both highly consequential and problematic' (1991:113) for an individual, and would therefore comprise aspects of a fateful moment.

The third stage highlighted by Mezirow is the 'transformed lifeworld' which takes on a 'discursive dialogue' in which various theoretical points of view are identified and considered in response to a dilemma. Such actions are encompassed in acts of reflection geared towards developing and empowering an individual's sense of agency. At this point the individual adopts a reformulated type of 'self evidence' through which he once again achieves a sense of normality within his everyday activities (Mezirow 1991).<sup>27</sup> Mezirow's (1990) focus on the act of reflection and its impact on decision-making strategies offer a useful basis for comparison with Giddens' notion of reflexivity in the rewriting of the biographical narrative, which rebuilds the protective cocoon and restores a sense of normality. For Mezirow (1990:6) 'Reflection in thoughtful action involves a pause to reassess by asking, What am I doing wrong?' For Giddens (1991), reflexivity entails a response to the existential question of 'Who am I?' There is a distinction here in terms of how these authors approach the question of meaning: For Mezirow it is a cognitive process of eliminating the anomalies in order to find a solution to the problem. For Giddens it is about locating a sense of security and self-worth in the world. The trigger for Giddens' (1991) notion of reflexivity is therefore an emotional one, and it is through the reflexive act that the *Umwelt* is maintained.

### ***(b) Travisano's conversion process as a shift from one 'universe of discourse' to another***

I believe it would be prudent to briefly introduce another perspective on identity transformation here; namely that of Travisano's analysis of the process of conversion, which he argues 'involves the ubiquitous utilization of an identity' (1970:605). Travisano (1970) analyses the extent of change in religious identity undergone by Jews who had converted either to fundamental Christianity or had become members of a Unitarian Society.<sup>28</sup> Drawing on the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, Travisano asserts that identity 'is a placed or validated announcement... identities tell

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<sup>27</sup> This type of dialogue resonates with Burbules' (2006 cited in Bozalek et al. 2014, 44) notion of 'third space dialogues' which are referred to as 'Problematic and problematizing moments... to producing new understandings'.

<sup>28</sup> Unitarian Universalism is a liberal religion that promotes freedom of belief and respect for all people. Unitarianism attracts people who do not subscribe to the dogmas present in most organised religions.

people what to do and expect during a given interaction' (1970:597). Taking on a new identity means that announcements about the new identity must be made and validated through renewed social interactions and practices. The extent to which the new identity is related or is different to previous identities, and the extent to which it impacts 'old relationships', for example, whether it leaves those relationships 'unchanged, transformed, or destroyed', determines the nature of the identity change that has occurred (1970:598).

Travisano (1970) differentiates between two distinct types of identity changes, namely, alternation and conversion. The latter is indicative of identity changes that involves 'complete disruption' (for example, from conservative Christian to Hindu), while alternations are identity changes that are 'prescribed or at least permitted' within individuals' contexts of social interaction. These include instances in which a wife becomes a mother, or when a pupil joins the school athletics team. Travisano locates the extent of the identity change in terms of the nature of the interactions between affected individuals and those with whom they relate in creating meaning. He identifies the social space in which such interactions between subjective meaning and behaviour are enacted and interpreted, as a 'universe of discourse' (Travisano 1970). Drawing on Mead (1934 cited in Travisano 1970:594) he defines a universe of discourse as 'a system of common or social meanings... constituted by a group of individuals carrying on and participating in a common social process of experience'. Through such interactions one's membership is legitimated and validated by others, resulting in one being 'situated', which implies that 'one has identity' (Stone 1962 cited in Travisano 1970:597). Noticeable here is that yet another possible meaning for the term 'discourse' seems to be apparent in Mead's explanation. We thus have Mead's emphasis on the social production of meaning through social experience running alongside Ivanič's use of discourse as pertaining to an analysis of how mature students' construct a sense of self in written texts.<sup>29</sup>

Travisano (1970) also draws on Burke's (1954) notion of an 'informing aspect', which locates and guides the manner in which we engage with the world. In other words an 'informing aspect' seems to indicate the means through which an individual relates to and constitutes herself in a particular universe of discourse. It resembles a guiding principle that informs specific beliefs and which structures the corresponding social practices that complement such beliefs. Utilising these concepts,

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<sup>29</sup> Both these discourse types are distinct from Foucault's approach to discourse analysis, which comprises technologies of power. Although my focus is not on discourse, it would be useful to at least be mindful of the different ways in which Travisano and Ivanič are utilising this term.

alternating from one identity to another (such as from a parent to a bank teller) involves little or no disruption to the ways in which one views the world (informing aspect) and participates in shared meanings through daily, routine interactions (universe of discourse) (Travisano 1970). The impact of alternating from one identity to another is such that the protective cocoon which sustains the biographical narrative of the self is not disturbed, thereby bearing some resonance to Giddens' (1991) notion of 'inconsequential' moments.

Conversion, on the other hand, involves radical change in terms of the ways in which one structures reality. Unlike alternation, there is a distinct change in the 'informing aspect' underlining one's 'biography'. This new 'informing aspect' is ubiquitous and constitutes 'the adoption of a pervasive identity' which signals a radical shift from one universe of discourse to another. In other words, conversion entails 'a radical reorganization of identity, meaning, and life' where the old universe of discourse is 'transformed through reinterpretation' (Travisano 1970). In the case of religious conversion for example, there is a fundamental shift in belief structures, whereby the new orientating principle becomes the primary lens for viewing and locating meaning in the world. This can be seen, for example, in the case of someone who claims to hold a traditional Christian identity. This person's universe of discourse would involve an acceptance of monotheism, a belief in the figure of Christ, his crucifixion and his second coming; a belief in the constructs of heaven and hell; the recognition and acceptance of particular religious symbols and holy sacraments such as the cross, baptism and communion; and the utilisation of one authoritative religious text, namely the Holy Bible. Such a Christian would also hold (or at least be aware of) the core belief underlining the Christian tradition that personal salvation can only be obtained through the acceptance of Jesus Christ. In so far as these core religious beliefs of an individual's Christian identity do not present themselves as pervasive in the individual's daily interactions with people in varying contexts (such as in the workplace, on the sports field or around the dinner table), the argument can be made that this person does not utilise only a single core informing aspect in daily social interactions.

However, a radical disruption to this individual's identity would occur if, for example, she converted to Hinduism and then made her Hindu identity the primary vehicle with which to engage with the world. She would first and foremost be a Hindu in all the varying contexts in which she interacts. This new and devout Hindu convert takes on a significantly different universe of discourse comprising some of the following: a belief in a supreme being whose qualities are manifested and revered in

other lesser deities, the acceptance of multiple authoritative religious texts, an acknowledgement and belief in a hierarchical framework of spiritual purity vested in a socially differentiated caste system, a belief in reincarnation, and the desire to perform one's duty within one's caste location to the best of one's ability, so as to escape the cycle of reincarnation and to become one with the cosmos. Although portrayed in an overly simplistic manner here, the nature of the severe shift in thought, practice and world view that occurs when a practicing Christian converts to becoming a devout Hindu is profound. It signals a drastic transformation in self-identity which severely impacts the nature of one's engagement with others. The convert in this sense 'takes on new definitions of situations and new situated behaviour' (Travisano 1970:598) and undergoes a process of catharsis that leaves her radically different from what she was before. Perhaps most pertinent in Travisano's analysis is the understanding that 'a conversion may not be merely a *change* in informing aspect but a *discovery* of one' (Travisano 1970:605).

Travisano's (1970) analysis provides valuable insights into the conceptual differences between alternation and conversion. His work has been criticised by the likes of Snow and Machalek (1983) who argue that the 'character of [the] change' undergone by the convert in Travisano's work remains under-developed. Snow and Machalek do however agree with Travisano that it *is* the universe of discourse that undergoes change and point out that instead of only shifting from one universe of discourse to a new one, that radical change can also be indicated by a 'shift from periphery to center' (1983:279) within an existing universe of discourse. In the case of the individual who professes to being a practicing Christian, but who does not make his Christian identity the core of his being, this conversion within an existing universe of discourse would take the form of such an individual extracting only the core beliefs and dogma from his Christian identity and shifting it from the periphery to the centre of all his interactions with the world. This act comprises Travisano's (1970:605) 'ubiquitous utilization of an identity', in that others would recognise this individual first and foremost as a Christian.

Giddens' (1991) conceptualisation of fateful moments and identification of the dilemmas (discussed earlier) that underline such moments is enriched by Travisano's analysis of conversion in quite substantial ways. Travisano's specific focus on the process of religious conversion and the impact thereof on the convert offers a practical basis for applying and exploring the dimensions of Giddens' analysis, especially the dilemmas he identifies. A distinguishing feature of Travisano's work is the

extent to which his analysis of religious conversion is able to depict quite vividly the enduring impact of an embracing community on the convert's sense of belonging and security in the world. This search for an embracing community offers yet another means with which to unpack some of the consequences of fateful moments within the context of late modernity.

An interesting question is how to view the relationship between the theoretical approaches used by Travisano and Giddens. We can observe that symbolic interactionism as used by Travisano has its roots in pragmatism and psychological behaviourism, where there is a distinct focus on thinking as a process. Symbolic interactionist theory is interested in how the self is formed, how it behaves, and in its capacity to change. This interest in the subjective experiences of individuals and how they interpret the world underlines theoretical approaches such as symbolic interactionism and phenomenology (Ritzer and Goodman 2003; Johnson and Melnikov 2008), and thus bears some resemblance to Giddens existentialist approach.<sup>30</sup> However, there are differences that can be noted. Travisano's notion of an 'informing aspect' stands out here as being quite significant in highlighting the extent to which everything in a convert's life can be structured around a core, single idea. However, by focusing on thinking as a process, Travisano tends to ignore the unconscious, emotive and meaning of life aspects which existentialism emphasises. In terms of Giddens' (1991) 'fateful moment' concept, an analysis of religious conversion (which by definition incorporates aspects of the irrational), would signal a shift beyond the thinking process to an exploration of locating meaning and purpose in life.

The existentialist stance, therefore, is one which goes beyond the location of individuals as 'merely rational or symbolic, or motivated by the desire to cooperate by interlinking actions' (Adler, Adler and Fontana 1987:223). Existential sociology seeks to emphasise the role that emotion and 'irrationality' play in influencing agency, asserting that individuals' are 'affected by structural constraints while remaining mutable, changeable, and emergent' (Adler, Adler and Fontana 1987:223). Of particular interest for the present study, given Travisano's focus on conscious modes of talking and thinking, is to consider whether the link formed between the 'informing aspect' and the 'universe of discourse' could also be emotional, and whether the decision to change is simply a rationale one or something far more complex. Key to this is developing some understanding about

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<sup>30</sup> Also see Johnson and Melnikov (2008) who emphasise that existential sociologists must develop an acute awareness of their own culture, the social interactions of that culture and how meaning is constructed and communicated.

what it is that triggers the type of drastic change that Travisano refers to. Perhaps the question to ask here is one that seeks to locate the anchor for the informing aspect and the universe of discourse. Are these the source of the change or are they simply symptoms of something deeper happening? It is here that a conversation between Travisano's informing aspect and Giddens' fateful moment concept proves to be a useful, in so far as the latter offers a means through which to gain insight into the 'anchoring' mechanism referred to above. In taking this forward I will draw on the conceptual understanding of an 'informing aspect' as a tool for gaining better insight into the consequences of the 'fateful moment' experiences of the research participants and the manner in which these consequences become manifested in their lives.

Adler, Adler and Fontana (1987) draw on Giddens' (1979) analysis to show that the focus on the 'unpredictability' of social life and the emphasis on the contextual and reflexive nature of social interactions, have signalled a clear shift from a macro to a more micro sociological emphasis. In doing so, existentialism draws on symbolic interactionism's claim (particularly from Goffman's emphasis on the performative aspects of social life), that meaning is negotiated, created and modified through acting in relation to others and through self-reflection. Symbolic interactionism's core concepts comprise the understanding of symbols, the mind, the self and society as being 'socially derived and modified through interaction' (Milliken and Schreiber 2012:686-692), thereby offering an important basis with which to unpack the approach used by Giddens. Milliken and Schreiber's (2012) study also offers quite an insightful look into the symbolic interactionist nature of grounded theory's approach to data analysis, thereby offering some useful insights to the analysis of data in this thesis.<sup>31</sup>

Based on the above analysis of Mezirow and Travisano, the likelihood of a relation between perspective transformations, identity conversions and Giddens' (1991) concept of 'fateful moments' is made probable through the shared understanding about the constructed and contested nature of finding meaning and purpose in the world. It is also worth noting that an obvious distinguishing factor between Mezirow, Travisano and Giddens, is Giddens' tendency to be at times a bit too macro-sociological in his categorisation, in which he categorises things by means of the nature of events rather than subjective experiences of individuals, as was alluded to by Coupland, Nussbaum and

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<sup>31</sup> See also Chapter 1 of Hewitt and Shulman (2011) which offers quite a discerning overview of symbolic interactionism's relationship with various theoretical approaches, such as psychoanalytic theory, phenomenology, social cognition and social construction.



Grossman (1993). Mezirow and Travisano on the other hand, offer a micro understanding of change, often at the expense of the social in that not enough attention is given to the contexts that inform perspective transformations and conversions. These weaknesses are recognised but prove to be quite fruitful when used to inform Giddens' analysis of fateful moments.

### ***(c) Unpacking the existentialist dimension of Giddens' fateful moment concept***

#### ***(c i) A brief conversation with Heidegger: An exploration of Dasein and authentic being***

Earlier, I offered a brief insight into how existentialism has built upon symbolic interactionism's basic premises. As mentioned, Giddens (1991) adopts an existentialist stance in his unpacking of the identity transformation process within the context of late modernity. He acknowledges that part of being human or 'Dasein' means having to live with angst, being confronted with a sense of impending crisis, and being aware of, according to Heidegger, one's 'own mortality' (Giddens 1991). Drawing on Kierkegaard's (1944 cited in Giddens 1991:48) explanation of anxiety as 'the struggle of being against non-being', Giddens is able to locate 'ontological awareness' as a crucial aspect of what it means to 'be' (Giddens 1981 cited in Giddens 1991). He uses this type of analyses as a reference point for Tillich's (1977 cited in Giddens 1991:49) claim that that such awareness constitutes an 'existential awareness of non-being' which 'is part of one's own being'. Death in this sense, argues Giddens, represents the 'transition from being to non-being', and it is the latter that is a major source of anxiety.<sup>32</sup>

Giddens' reference to Heidegger is important here, as it establishes quite a particular understanding of 'Dasein' as a state of 'Being' in the world.<sup>33</sup> Heidegger's capitalising of the term 'Being' is associated with meaning and intelligibility and is used to distinguish it from the understanding of 'being' as an entity, as in human being. This understanding of 'Being' is ontological in nature and it is here that Heidegger puts forward the concept of 'Dasein (Da-sein: there-being)', as that which is indicative of 'the distinctive mode of Being realized by human beings' (Heidegger cited in Wheeler 2013:np).

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<sup>32</sup> Chapter 2 of Giddens' (1991) analysis deals with the issues of ontology and existentialism in quite a detailed manner.

<sup>33</sup> Wheeler's (2013) analysis of Heidegger's 1927 publication of *Being and Time*, offers a good starting point for unpacking the meaning of 'Dasein'. Also see Finkelde's (2013) location of Heidegger in post-structuralism.

For Heidegger, the attraction of being human is the unique ability of humans to have an awareness of 'Being' while engaging in everyday routines, and the ability to reflect on the nature of that state of 'Being'. The ability of humans to choose a particular way of 'Being' distinguishes them from inanimate objects and plant and animal life (see Mulhall 2005 cited in Wheeler 2013). 'Dasein' does not comprise the biological, nor 'the person', but is regarded rather as 'a way of life shared by the members of some community'. Heidegger's 'Dasein' is therefore concerned with 'Being-in-the-world'. Heidegger illustrates this understanding of 'Dasein' by comparing it to an understanding of what it means to 'dwell in a house'. The understanding of 'dwell' in this example, goes far beyond spatial location, and extends quite emphatically to the idea of having a sense of belonging and familiarity, a specific type of attachment. Understood in this manner, 'Dasein is (essentially) in the world'. 'Dasein' is offset by Heidegger's identification of feelings of anxiety, which conveys a particular understanding of a world in which 'I am no longer at home in' (Wheeler 2013:np). This understanding of 'Dasein' offers a particular type of insight into Giddens' conceptualisation of the impact of a 'fateful moment' on the individual's sense of 'Being-in-the-world'. The latter is of course developed in relation to those with whom one shares a social reality, and it is here that Heidegger offers further insights into how the self is constituted in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity.

As humans enter into relationships with each other, discovering similar interests and views of the world, the individual Dasein "dissolves ... into a kind of Being of 'the Others'". This leads to the notion of 'they'; a 'they' which acts to 'prescribe the kind of Being of everydayness' (Heidegger 1927 cited in Wheeler 2013). This distinction between the individual and the 'they' establishes the groundwork for Heidegger's distinction between the 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' parts of the self. The authentic self is a self that is 'my own,' it 'is mine... owned by me'. In contrast, the 'inauthentic self' is described by Heidegger as "the fallen self, the self lost to the 'they'". He argues that by simply going through the motions of daily life in uncritical imitation of the 'they', the 'inauthentic Dasein avoids owning its own life'. To be authentic, therefore, is the display and acting out of a type of 'resoluteness' in which an individual chooses one of the 'possible ways of being' which is made available by the society that such an individual belongs to. The distinction between being authentic and inauthentic can therefore be viewed in terms of the 'mine-self' and the 'they-self' (Wheeler 2013). The notion of 'fallen-ness' captured by the 'they-self' is indicative of the way in which Dasein is manifested, existentially. As an intricate component of our Being, 'fallen-ness' suggests that the responsibility for being inauthentic rests on the part of the individual (Sheehan 2002 cited in Wheeler 2013:np). Wheeler (2013)

concludes from this that 'authenticity is not about being isolated from others, but rather about finding a different way of relating to others such that one is not lost to the they-self'. Giddens (1991) adds to this debate on authenticity by highlighting the important role that morality plays in late modernity. He sums up his position on morality as an important dimension of human existence as follows:

Repressed existential issues, related not just to nature but to the moral parameters of existence as such, press themselves back on to the agenda... on the level of everyday life... moral/existential problems are... brought forward into public debate. The specific moral arena of such debates concerns, not just what should be done for human beings to survive in nature, but how existence itself should be grasped and 'lived': This is Heidegger's 'question of Being'.  
(1991:224)

Heidegger's analysis, therefore, offers useful insights into Giddens' work. I will be drawing on some of Heidegger's conceptualising of 'Dasein' to support my analysis of the construction of Coloured identity amongst my research participants in a post-apartheid, democratic South African setting. Heidegger's insights will thus be used in conjunction with Giddens' concept of fateful moments, in which notions such as 'false self', 'authenticity' and 'self-actualisation' (Giddens 1991) begins to emerge. The aim here is to build upon Giddens' insights and to create possibilities for further enquiry.

The discussion above allows for a more sophisticated approach to analysing representations of self-identity in a democratic SA. Reconstructing a new sense of self-identity can therefore also be viewed from the perspective of an existential crisis, which is something that compels us to confront 'our true nature... our true meaning, our true *essence* as a human being, when the surface meaning has been removed' (University of Idaho n.d.). The erosion of set routines and the clash between multiple truths in the modern arena amplify this state of crisis, placing increasing pressure on the protective cocoon to maintain a sense of meaning and purpose in life. The existentialist stance here is one concerned with 'the nature of being' (Reker 2000). As an 'existential process' the act of transformation therefore involves the 'dynamic process of transforming a given reality into a new potentiality' (Reker 2000:41). The questions raised by Giddens related to unpacking issues of ontology, anxiety, self-identity, reflexive awareness and decision-making, thus occupy a central space in existentialism (Reker and Chamberlain 2000).

***(c ii) Distinguishing Mezirow: Establishing the frameworks for an integrative approach***

I now turn our attention towards making more explicit the approaches adopted by Mezirow and Giddens which rest on their respective philosophical orientations to the issues of change and transformation of self- identity. Of primary concern is the manner in which the identity changes taking place constitutes a crisis of being in the world. Mezirow's work seeks to uncover the established patterns of recognition that adults use for learning. These established patterns then need to be interrogated through a process of critical reflection to uncover possible deficiencies. This gives his work more of a cognitive orientation. The building up of a 'disorientating dilemma' (Mezirow 1991), and the subsequent change in meaning perspective which comes about through the act of reflection, alludes to a cognitive act. Mezirow's (1990) example of the degree of transformation that occurs in the identity of a housewife is a good illustration of this extended build-up of difficulties over time. In the above example, a housewife who is content with her life is exposed to a variety of women through the secretarial course she attends in the evenings. Her interactions with other married women in the course, lead her to the realisation that there are other ways of defining womanhood, and as a result she begins to question her role as a traditional, stereotypical housewife. It would appear that Mezirow's philosophical positioning here encompasses an element of cognitive dissonance, in that there is an interrogation of the manner in which existing cognitive structures have been created and the extent to which these structures tend to distort or hamper an individual's capacity to access more effective means of learning. The housewife's continued questioning sets off a series of events in which she begins to transform the meaning perspectives associated with her role as housewife, a process which culminates in the adoption of a new perspective on womanhood. This represents a cognitive process of change in identity.

On the other hand, we have a housewife who regards her care for her husband and their children as that which defines who she is, that which gives meaning and purpose to her entire life and dominates most of her social interactions with others. Such a housewife would probably be faced with an existential crisis if she and her husband divorced and her children become independent adults who no longer need her as before. Being confronted with the absence of those actions and routines that defined her sense of self and embeddedness in the world, creates feelings of loss, emptiness and anxiety in her life. This represents the type of crisis which Giddens attaches to his concept of 'fateful moment' in that the self has to be remade with new purpose and intention in the

world. Unlike the cognitive aspect of change associated with Mezirow above, the change that Giddens foregrounds here has a strong existentialist dimension.

Giddens (1991) does acknowledge however, that part of being able to establish a sense of coherence in our lives, must also involve cognitive frameworks of reference, but goes on to assert that these are combined with the appropriate levels of 'emotional commitment'. Such commitment, which takes the form of 'trust, hope and courage', resides in the unconscious, and is described by Giddens as a form of '*emotional inoculation*' (italics Giddens) against the threat of 'existential anxieties'.

***(c iii) Getting back to Giddens, Travisano, Mezirow and Ivanič : Creating possibilities for a more integrated approach to understanding the process of identity transformation***

The insights offered by the respective authors discussed above, all offer particular insights for uncovering layers of meaning that can be extracted from the 'fateful moment' concept. In order to capitalise on these insights, I have moved towards considering the possibility of adopting an integrated approach, as in the case of drawing on the identity transformation concepts developed by Travisano, Mezirow and Ivanič, to complement Giddens' analytical framework in this thesis.

The existential-phenomenological emphasis on '*Dasein*' and on the meaning of experience is firmly grounded in Giddens' work. The manner in which meaning is negotiated in relation to others through language, actions and symbols underlines Travisano's symbolic interactionist approach in which the self is a social actor. The cognitive focus on how the formation of schemas leads to a rigid and 'sedimented' production of information about the world that hampers the necessary development of change and growth, underlines Mezirow's approach to adult learning. Ivanič adopts a psychosocial life span perspective to unpack how the self is constituted through discourse, at a critical period in life. Adler, Adler and Fontana (1987) and Hewitt and Shulman (2011) assert some of the commonalities that underline symbolic interactionist and existentialist approaches, and show how these complement each other in the pursuit of furthering knowledge about the human condition. Corrie and Milton's (2000) research has shown that existential and cognitive approaches need not be mutually exclusive in the search to unpack how individuals create, confront and transform meaning in the world. These authors assert the need to consider simultaneously "the existential focus on 'being' and the cognitive focus on 'doing'". By drawing on aspects of the cognitive approach to

unpacking the nature of experience, such as paying attention to the impact of early socialisation on the formation of values, we gain added insight into the nature of an individual's embeddedness in the world.<sup>34</sup>

The use of Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*, together with Travisano (1970), Mezirow (1990; 1991) and Ivanič's (1998) insights into how the self is vested in social interaction through shared understandings of the meanings that construct reality, has been shown. These authors relay how the self is able to act reflexively in creating new possibilities for 'Being', and using their respective insights in relation to Giddens' (1991) 'fateful moment' concept has added layers of depth and complexity to Giddens' analysis of the identity transformation process. Travisano's (1970) symbolic interactionism stance shows how the process of identity conversion involves the appropriation of a new core 'informing aspect', which the convert uses to view and reflect on all aspects of her social interactions with the world. When this notion of an 'informing aspect' is applied to Giddens' 'fateful moment' concept, it helps to shed light on the new terms of reference that the research participants use to define their location and purpose in the world. Of significance here is the extent to which Travisano's concept can be used to identify the new driving force which maintains the research participants' transformed sense of self and well-being in the world. This allows for a better understanding of the dynamics attached to how an individual feels on the inside and acts on the outside.

Mezirow's (1990; 1991) cognitive approach also allows for a particular type of micro analysis to be applied to the existential dimensions of Giddens' 'fateful moment' concept. Mezirow shows how individuals develop established patterns of interpreting meaning during childhood, which can become rigid and inflexible over time. This creates mental barriers to new, unfamiliar and seemingly risky experiences, thereby allowing individuals to maintain a rational sense of predictable knowledge about the world. This element of predictability sheds light on the importance that Giddens attaches to an individual's ability to engage in routine, daily activities and the extent to which this creates a sense of normality and familiarity in the individual's life. Building on this, Giddens' (1991) 'fateful moment' comes to the fore when this predictable, routine nature of life is shattered, breaking through any previously established levels of '*emotional inoculation*' to produce a state of emotional

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<sup>34</sup> During feedback discussions with my thesis supervisor, a concern was raised that a more critical reading of Corrie and Milton could suggest that because the use of existentialist and cognitive approaches both get practical results (it either works or it does not), we can simply use both in the appropriate circumstances. Although this gave rise to the question of whether this is a practical move or a theoretical one, I have mainly drawn on the *possibilities* for collaboration that their analyses offers, as a way forward.

turmoil and anxiety within the individual. Mezirow's (1990; 1991) cognitive approach therefore offers a means for recognising the ways in which the research participants in this study produce knowledge about themselves and others in the world. His insights also provide a basis for recognising elements of rigidity in the research participants' belief and value systems and allows for a much deeper understanding of the levels of anxiety that they experience when their assumptions about the world are challenged and shattered.

Ivanič (1998) pays attention to how individuals engage with critical moments and events in their lives. Her focus on drastic change that takes place within specific periods of the individual's lifespan, generates specific insights that allows Giddens' 'fateful moment' concept to be located more firmly within the individual's life history. This provides for a more contextually rich understanding of the various phases of an individual's life (for example, home, school and university), the nature of the relationships that the individual develops during these phases and the ways in which these relationships overlap and connect with specific events in the course of the individual's life. Ivanič's analysis therefore allows the 'fateful moment' to be located within a specific phase of an individual's life, which can then be viewed in relation to the individual's other life phases, so as to fully grasp the extent of the change undergone. Her analysis takes seriously the new phase of life that individuals enter into, as well as the new space (for example, university) in which that phase unfolds, thereby allowing 'fateful moments' to be analysed in relation to the structures, norms, values and practices that make up the new space. The comparison of the new reality with the realities of the individual's past, makes it easier to identify and understand the discrepancies and conflicts that do emerge for the individual in these new spaces.

I therefore draw on Travisano, Mezirow and Ivanič's respective insights to complement the use of Giddens' conceptual tools and to allow for a much more sophisticated engagement in 'thick description' (Geertz 1973). I wish to emphasise that I have used Travisano, Mezirow and Ivanič in a very selective manner since they offer distinct theoretical insights into the process of identity transformation, especially through their employment of a range of highly innovative concepts. I have drawn on some of these concepts in order to enrich my use of Giddens' concepts. I therefore use Giddens' work as the *anchor theory* here, while the other theoretical insights have been employed to fill in some of the gaps in Giddens' work, thereby giving voice to some of the things which Giddens has not covered.

Furthermore, it must also be highlighted that this is *not* a theoretical thesis; it is an empirical study focussed on social phenomena. As such, the theoretical approaches utilised by the aforementioned authors' lend themselves to be used in a very creative and substantive manner in conjunction with Giddens' work. The present study serves to highlight the validity and applicability of Giddens' theoretical contributions to sociological enquiry, particularly in the area of identity formation and transformation. In the present study I pay particular attention to the common thread linking all of the above approaches, namely, the manner in which the sense of self is transformed when the normal, everyday interactions in which individuals participate, are severely disrupted. Everyday life in this sense has distinct, recognisable patterns of organisation which provide a context for meaningful interaction and for reflecting upon that interaction in response to the questions of 'Who am I?' and 'Why am I here?' These commonalities produce what Adler, Adler and Fontana (1987:218; 221) refer to as 'eclectic synthesis', the core of 'everyday life sociology'. Such an eclectic approach intensifies the importance of recognising and understanding the value of 'fateful moments' as important crossroads in people's lives. By using the lens of Coloured identity, I show how the conceptual understanding of fateful moments can be developed in conjunction with the lived experiences of the research participants to signal their capacities for change and transformation in an increasingly complex world.

## Conclusion

In this discussion, I have outlined the ways in which different authors position themselves with respect to unpacking the concepts of self-identity and identity transformation. What needs to be highlighted here is the growing awareness about the different but overlapping ways in which various theoretical approaches situate, talk about and represent aspects of human nature and a sense of self in a world which offers multiple possibilities for ways of being. The importance of locating meaning within context, of acknowledging the social structures and forces at play in the formation of selves, and the recognition of our abilities to adapt to change and also to create possibilities for enacting change, forms part of the dynamics of being culturally and socially situated, and of being embedded in the world. We are all, as Herrington (2000) asserts, *persons in process*.



As researchers, it is important for us to be mindful of our own bias and our own preferred modes of engagement with the meaning making process when selecting various analytical approaches. Such preferential treatment of a number of different approaches to a common area of enquiry, coupled with the scholarly interest each of these approaches continues to attract, is a necessary step in uncovering the manifold versions of *truth* that exist in the world. A positive outcome in the pursuit of the sense of self in these different types of cultural texts is that it allows for a 'critical comparison and assessment of texts of identity' (Shotter and Gergen 1989). Such variety must be viewed as a resource that adds to scholarly debate about phenomena which tend to disrupt the sense of 'normalcy with which individuals... surround themselves' (Giddens 1991:127) and is therefore not without merit. As such, our use of particular terms, our application of various labels to the concepts we use in our academic pursuits, must be grounded in a particular intellectual tradition that affords validity to their usage, and which is generative in its pursuits of social justice and change. At the same time their locations within such intellectual traditions must at least be open to scrutiny from other traditions that seek to dispute, affirm, or add to existing levels of understanding. The growing prominence of interdisciplinary studies today bears testimony to this, and if anything, has shown the relative nature of *being*.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### The Mellon-Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) Programme

The research participants for this study are all MMUF students. As part of UCT's equity development initiatives, the MMUF space is dynamic and progressive in terms of its transformative agenda. In this section I offer a brief description of the MMUF programme and explain how its various components fit together and complement each other to achieve both the MMUF goals and UCT's equity development objectives. One of the arguments made in this thesis is that the manner in which the MMUF programme unfolds, makes an impact on how MMUF students represent and construct their identities. As such, an insight into the operational aspects of MMUF is important, as it allows readers a glimpse into the contexts that influence attitudes, behaviour and perceptions of self and others, amongst the MMUF fellows. This also allows readers to locate the MMUF structure within the UCT setting and the broader South African race and identity landscape. In terms of the progression of this study, this chapter provides important contextual information about the physical and spatial locations in which the theory will be applied.

#### The MMUF Mission

The MMUF programme was established in 1988 under the banner of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, a United States non-profit corporation. The Foundation awards approximately \$200 million annually in the form of grants, which are allocated among five defined programme areas. The MMUF programme falls under the area of *Higher Education and Scholarship* (The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, 2014). MMUF's mission is underlined by two fundamental objectives: firstly, to increase the number of minority students who are committed to eradicating racial inequalities, and who will pursue PhDs in the arts and sciences. Secondly, to reduce the serious under-representation of certain minority groups within tertiary institutions, and to address the educational consequences that develop from these disparities (MMUF Program, 2014). There is a strong equity and transformational agenda attached to the programme.

## MMUF at UCT

MMUF has proved to be a successful equity development programme in the USA. In 2002 the programme was extended to a location outside of its borders. UCT, having satisfied specific selection criteria,<sup>1</sup> became the first South African university to house the MMUF programme. Since its initiation at UCT, two other South African universities, namely, the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) have also joined the MMUF programme. Collectively these institutions share in the responsibility of inducting and integrating South African MMUF students into the programme.

The goals of the MMUF programme aim to: identify and recruit promising Black undergraduates (students in their final year of a three-year degree programme or in their penultimate year of a four-year professional degree programme), offer financial and academic support and mentoring, put specific structures and networking opportunities in place to encourage fellows to pursue postgraduate studies to PhD level.

The coordinating function of the MMUF programme is undertaken by university appointed MMUF coordinators. At UCT there are two MMUF coordinators: Kathy Erasmus, who deals with administrative matters and I take responsibility for the academic components of the programme.

## The UCT MMUF Structure

### *The Orientation Weekend*

The structure of the MMUF programme at UCT has been designed to provide maximum support for the students in terms of finance, mentoring, skills workshops, seminars, conferences and processing applications for postgraduate programmes. Only five MMUF students are selected per year. The majority of the UCT MMUF fellows are selected from the Science and Humanities faculties.<sup>2</sup> They come from diverse backgrounds from across SA and the South African Development Community (SADC). During orientation, the core role of the MMUF campus coordinators is to provide an

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<sup>1</sup> Criteria that formed part of the selection process included the following: the higher education institution's active commitment to diversity; evidence of the institution's active recruitment of Black undergraduates; a good retention and completion record of underrepresented groups; and a good track record of minority and underrepresented groups in postgraduate programmes. The MMUF Programme is located as a special project in the Faculty of the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) at UCT. For more insight see the outline of the MMUF Programme at UCT on CHED's website: [www.ched.uct.ac.za/project/mmuf](http://www.ched.uct.ac.za/project/mmuf)

<sup>2</sup> A decision was made by the USA MMUF Programme Director in 2013 to only select students from the Humanities at UCT. This was instituted for the first time in 2014 at UCT.

environment in which the students can bond as a cohort. Upon selection, the coordinators hold an introductory session with the new cohort, after which a weekend orientation workshop is held in Cape Town at an off campus location. Here the UCT cohort meets up with the newly selected MMUF cohorts from UWC and Wits. The orientation weekend introduces these cohorts to various components of the programme. Workshop sessions are held dealing with research-related issues, the importance of selecting good faculty mentors, and the USA MMUF Summer Institute programme. However, since Wits and UWC only joined the programme more than five years after UCT, the UCT MMUF fellows initially only had UCT MMUF structures as a reference for support during their orientation. The latter is the context in which my research participants were introduced and initiated into the programme.

Senior MMUF students (those who are in Masters and PhD programmes), also attend the orientation weekend to talk about their experiences as MMUF recipients and how it has impacted their lives. They share some of the challenges they faced and the strategies they adopted to survive. In this way the senior MMUF fellows become peer mentors to the new cohorts. The impact made by the senior MMUF fellows on the new recruits is quite profound, especially in terms of the research identities they have carved out for themselves in their various departments, the recognition they have received in terms of awards and academic achievements, and also simply in terms of their self-confidence and the manner in which they carry themselves. Many new MMUF fellows regard their senior fellows as role models, as those who are busy paving the way for those who follow. However, the words of advice and encouragement can also be a bit overwhelming for the new recruits, making them doubt their sense of worthiness in this setting. This was especially so for one of the research participants, Margaret, a Science student in the cell and molecular biology stream, who describes her orientation ordeal with senior MMUF fellows as follows:

It was... Selwyn<sup>3</sup> and Glenn's little talk that freaked me out. I just thought [laughing] you guys picked the wrong [person] [chuckles] because after that weekend I was like, 'did these people not talk to me, did they not see my major?'... I was like 'I can't do the thing' – yes, I'm good at being tested and therefore my marks are good but I didn't believe that I was an intellectual... an... academic at that point. What are these people talking about! [chuckles] I have to be an intellectual *and* all of this... All these pressures – and that's when I started crying actually.

(Margaret MMUF interview 2007)

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<sup>3</sup> This student, operating under the pseudonym of Selwyn, is implicated in many of Glenn's narratives which will be used later in this thesis. Selwyn and Glenn were selected as UCT MMUF fellows the year before Margaret's selection, and based on their seniority are invited to speak to Margaret's cohort about their experiences on the MMUF programme.

At this early stage of the MMUF programme there is already an overwhelming sense of responsibility and accountability placed on the MMUF fellows. Many relish the opportunity to prove themselves, especially amongst the USA MMUF students, whom they visit in the June to July period of their first year as MMUF fellows. Others, like Margaret, are a bit unsure, but receive encouragement and moral support from the other four members of their MMUF cohort. This cohort cohesion and the manner in which they relate to each other is vitally important for the success of the programme. It entails meeting up with, in most cases, four strangers with whom they may initially share nothing except an MMUF identity, and on whom they come to depend on, especially during the stay in the USA. The cohort itself has an interesting dynamic, especially in terms of how they, as representatives and ambassadors of UCT, negotiate and represent aspects of their racial identities to the USA MMUF fellows. This usually introduces elements of differentiation and similarities into the cohort; elements which the UCT cohort as a whole has to grapple with internally and externally, in relation to their USA counterparts (this will become apparent later in the analysis section when Selwyn and Glenn enter a debate about race and identity in SA). The orientation weekend thus introduces students to some of the complexities that the MMUF programme deals with in terms of race and class (and also sexual) identities, and how these impact on being an academic of colour in a South African university setting. It starts off the process of introspection and asks MMUF fellows to be more aware of the nature of their engagements with the world, and the types of impacts that these have on their sense of purpose in life.

### *Mentors and Mentorship*

The session on mentorship at the orientation weekend alerts students to their and their mentors' responsibilities in the mentor-mentee relationship. Upon selection the MMUF students are paired up with UCT academic mentors of their choice. The campus coordinators take on the responsibility of contacting prospective mentors in the various academic departments, to discuss the programme with them and to see if they would be willing to act as mentors to the MMUF fellows. Mentors take on a very active role within the programme. They advise, guide and monitor their mentee's progress. They offer support, motivate and create opportunities for nurturing the growth and intellectual development of the MMUF students. The UCT mentors work closely with the UCT MMUF campus coordinators, to ensure that MMUF students remain on track. Through this relationship, mentors are able to alert the campus coordinators when they suspect or come across any problems that need to be addressed concerning their mentees. An instance of how important mentor input is can be seen in

the example of an MMUF science student,<sup>4</sup> who thought it a good idea to add Astro-Physics to his curriculum. He struggled to maintain his grades in this course and was heading towards failing, thereby severely impacting his chances of getting into an Honours programme. The mentor brought this to the coordinators attention early enough in the semester. Together with course convenors and faculty administrators we were able to negotiate on behalf of this student, so that he could withdraw from said course and continue to work on maintaining his excellent grades in his compulsory courses to get into an Honours programme. Establishing and maintaining good relations with faculty mentors is an important part of our job as campus coordinators, and adds an extra safety-net for the MMUF students in ensuring that they remain on track academically.

As MMUF campus coordinators, my colleague and I take the input of mentors a step further; we invite them to present a lecture, seminar or workshop at a selected MMUF event. The mentors' engagement with the MMUF fellows and other faculty mentors at these gatherings serves to contextualise the nature of the MMUF mission and offers the mentors some insight into how they could position themselves within this transformative framework. Investing in the MMUF mentors and their mentees in this way has proved to be an effective tool for raising awareness of equity and transformation issues in various departments. The strong mentoring philosophy inherent in the MMUF programme is therefore the source of much of its success. These mentoring structures provide the MMUF students with important reference points in their academic careers and beyond.

A crucial aspect of the mentoring relationship needs to be signalled here, namely, the build-up of a relation of trust. Through this relationship, MMUF students come to rely on mentoring advice and guidance, not only related to academics, but also on social and personal issues that impact their lives. In my capacity as a MMUF campus coordinator, I have dealt with a variety of issues, such as: MMUF students' reservations about whether or not to marry and how it will impact on their academic studies, the impact an absent father has had on their lives, whether it is better to enter into serious relationships with a partner who is also an academic, about how to deal with family members who do not understand the dynamics of studying at university, dealing with the impact of the death of a loved one, negotiating problematic relationships with faculty mentors, and whom to approach for work opportunities so that living expenses can be covered. The nature of the mentoring that occurs thus goes well beyond the clear-cut academic matters of the day, and calls for a very different, hands-on parenting-type approach, in which there is no one-approach-suits-all solution. The nature

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<sup>4</sup> This took place before the 2014 decision was made to exclude Science students from the MMUF application pool.

of the MMUF work thus poses great challenges for UCT MMUF campus coordinators. It is the open-natured and honest working relationship that we have developed over the past twelve years that has allowed us to collaborate and to hone our collective instincts when it comes to advising students and making decisions about their future trajectories. Of course, much of our success with our students is also based on simply being lucky in terms of our instincts when it comes to implementing the selection criteria. Nevertheless, this close working relationship has enabled us to have quite a good sense of the types of students who are really going to benefit from the MMUF programme and who are also going to enable the programme to grow in strength and prominence.

### *The USA Summer Institute*

In June of each year, the new SA MMUF cohorts travel to universities in the USA to attend a 4-6-week MMUF Summer Institute programme, alongside newly selected MMUF students from the USA. The cohorts from UCT, UWC and Wits each travel to separate locations. The research participants in this thesis, however, were inducted before Wits and UWC joined the MMUF fold. As the sole SA MMUF institution at the time, only UCT MMUF fellows attended the Summer Institute, which was hosted at Emory University in Atlanta Georgia. The American MMUF students attending the Institute comprised about four or five students from Emory University, and the rest were from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU's) in the Atlanta region, including the likes of Spellman, Morehouse, Clark Atlanta, Fisk and Tuskegee. The UCT fellows shared accommodation with their American peers on campus. This living arrangement is structured in such a way as to allow students to share everyday household tasks and to encourage maximum social and academic interaction. This deepens critical debate and insights into issues of diversity. The UCT coordinators' accompany the UCT students on the USA trip, and are housed separately. The Summer Institute syllabus comprises lectures, seminars, workshops and educational outings (including a visit to the birthplace of Martin Luther King), and is geared towards developing research skills and preparing students for the challenges of postgraduate studies.

At a more general level, the syllabus also orientates students towards thinking about the complexities of race and identity, and of potentially becoming an academic of colour within predominantly White educational institutions. Issues of equity and transformation feature quite prominently at the Summer Institute at Emory, and force the South African cohorts in particular, to think very critically about their own locations, given SA's complex racial history. The racial classification of 'Coloured' versus 'Black' amongst the South African cohorts is especially difficult to explain to their peers, and

disagreements amongst the South African cohort as to what these terms mean are common place, as we will see later in the analysis section.<sup>5</sup> Despite these disagreements the Summer Institute is focussed on developing collegiality amongst participants, and does provide a safe space for students of colour (including various minority groupings in the USA context) to articulate their feelings. If anything, the Summer Institute space is one which reveals the heterogeneous nature of Black identity in SA. At a more micro level, things become a bit more complex when the American students are confronted with UCT students who self-identify as 'Coloured'. This is understood as a derogatory term in the American Black liberation context, having being replaced by the term 'African American' as affirmation of Black identity in the USA. The following extract illustrates some of the complexities that UCT students at the USA Summer Institute have to grapple with when defining themselves in racial terms to their American MMUF peers. The insights offered in the extract are from a Cape Malay<sup>6</sup> UCT MMUF student, referred to as 'FS', who is classified as 'Coloured' in SA. Both FS and Altaf (not their real names) were part of Margaret and Issachar's MMUF cohort.

FS: I defined myself as Coloured but a different kind of Coloured person than Margaret and Issachar, which is so hard for them [the American students] to understand.

GN: Okay.

FS: Because I don't have the same cultural background as they do. My, my -. I mean, it's almost like I'm a diff(erent) -. I mean, I am a different kind of Coloured person. I don't come from a mixed Black and White heritage the way they do. I have a slave history, an immigrant history to my side of being Coloured, but I still identify myself as being Coloured with them [Issachar and Margaret], which is hard for the Americans to understand. [Laughing] And then [Altaf] being Indian<sup>7</sup> just confused everyone.

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<sup>5</sup> See also Nomdo (2006) for more insight into the conflict between UCT MMUF fellows Sipho and Loyanda at Emory concerning their respective understanding of what it means to be Black, and how class and language issues are tied into this. Sipho argues from a strong working-class community-based cultural orientation within the Black rural township setting, while Loyanda occupies a strong middle-class, westernised orientation, which is very individualistic.

<sup>6</sup> When the Dutch first arrived in the Cape Colony under the Dutch East Indian Company (DEIC) in 1652, they needed a source of labour to work their farms. The Dutch government used this as an opportunity to import political exiles from the East Indies, to work as slaves on these farms. These exiles were from East African regions and Malaysia. This group of slaves became integrated into the Cape colony population and were later referred to as the 'Cape Malay'. See *South African History Online* for more insight into this.

<sup>7</sup> The first Indians also arrived in SA as slaves under Dutch colonial rule in 1684. From 1860 onwards, Indians arrived in SA as indentured labourers and were put to work by the colonial government on Natal's sugar plantations. In addition to the indentured group, another group known as 'free Indians' were also allowed into SA as traders, but at their own expense. When the system of indentured labour came to an end in 1911, most Indians chose to remain in SA, mainly in the Natal region, which remains the province in which most South African Indians are located. For a concise overview of the location of Indians in SA, see *South African History Online*.



Ja, because the Americans are like, okay, so if you're not Black, you're not White, you're Coloured, right?... you're like 'yes' – except for [Altaf], he's Indian.

Because they asked me if I considered myself 'Black'. And I'm like – I'm not sure. I mean, our government considers me non-white, but then when they break it down for a census I'm Coloured, I don't get to be Black because Black has a certain assumption that you look a certain way, that you have a certain history – that makes you Black.

GN: Okay.

FS: If you don't fit in that category, you don't get to be Black.

The clear distinction between 'White' and 'Black' identity in the USA places quite a bit of pressure on the SA fellows (comprised of African, Coloured and Indian students) when it comes to how they choose to self-identify in racial terms.

Given the complexities that students are often faced with, coordinators relate to students on a number of different levels, ranging from being a nurturer and providing affirmation and encouragement, to being an enforcer of the rules of engagement at the institute. The South African coordinators work together with the USA coordinators, resident faculty mentors and USA MMUF postgraduate student assistants in providing a strong support base for the new MMUF cohorts to draw on. Because of the intensity of the syllabus at the Summer Institute (daily lectures and seminars, writing workshops, scheduled library research time) the students quickly learn the importance of networking and depending on each other. For the South African cohorts, this becomes essential as they are so far from home, particularly those who are travelling abroad for the first time.

The Summer Institute experience ends with students presenting the research they have conducted at the Institute. This takes the format of a ten minute video-taped presentation for each student, with a few minutes been allocated at the end of the presentation for critique from the audience, comprising their MMUF peers, coordinators, mentors, and visitors. Each student receives a video-copy of their presentations to share with their mentors at the home institution. Students are also encouraged to publish their research papers in the *Mellon-Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Journal*, which receives

submissions from all MMUF related disciplines. The papers submitted undergo a strict peer-review process and compete on an equal basis for publication selection.

### *January Programme*

In January of the following year, the cohorts who attended the previous Summer Institutes meet up with each other at the South African MMUF January Programme, held in Cape Town. The South African MMUF students and selected members from the USA cohorts at the various USA institutions are provided with the opportunity to revisit their Summer Institute experience and to engage with issues of race, identity and class within the South African setting. The MMUF January Programme comprises visits to historical sites as well as providing the opportunity to visit and engage with people in the local townships. These types of social engagements take a few of the South African students into the Black and Coloured townships where they grew up and where many still reside. Issues of how the townships and township life are represented to the Americans is thus a sensitive issue, with a few students getting into quite heated arguments with tour guides whom they felt were misrepresenting their communities. Here again, issues related to what it means to be 'Coloured' and 'Black' within the South African and also the American setting is brought to the fore. Students are encouraged to reflect critically on experiences such as these and on their research journeys, so as to allow them the opportunity to think holistically about their lives, especially in relation to taking up careers within academia.

### *Wits Conference*

The last official gathering of the South African MMUF students takes place in September at the Wits University MMUF Conference, to mark the end of the second year of the scholarship. Students are invited to this conference to present their reflections on how certain aspects of their research developed, the types of challenges they faced, and the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. Part of the presentation also includes aspects related to their future plans. Over the past few years common themes have emerged from the students reflections at this conference. These include reflections on issues relating to experiences of conflict and contradictions in identity, feeling 'displaced' within the university setting, dealing with the 'guilt' of being advantaged, navigating 'uncomfortable' spaces, and learning how to value and 'invest' in oneself (SA MMUF student reflections, Wits Conference, 2011-2014). Although the research participants in this study did not attend a Wits-type conference (as Wits was not part of the SA MMUF Programme at the time), the themes emerging out of the students reflections at Wits bears strong similarity to some of the issues

that these research participants raised during their interview sessions with me. The USA Summer Institute experience plays a crucial role in these interviews, and likewise for the reflections at the Wits conference. After two years, students exit the MMUF programme and become part of the MMUF Social Science Representative Council (SSRC), the postgraduate component of the Mellon programme. The director of the SSRC also attends the Wits conference and makes use of the opportunity to inform the MMUF students about what the SSRC has to offer.

### **MMUF Statistics and Achievements**

To date, MMUF has approximately 100 campus coordinators at 42 institutions (including 3 in SA) and 39 historically Black US colleges and universities (HBCU's). As of 2014, there were over 4000 participating MMUF students, of whom more than 500 have earned PhD's, 85 of whom have received tenured posts (MMUF Programme, 2014).

The UCT-MMUF programme has established itself as prestigious in terms of its academic achievements to date. Since its inception in 2002, eleven UCT-MMUF students earned PhD's by the end of 2014, with nine PhD's in progress (research participants in this study are amongst these). The programme has been particularly effective in terms of acting as a platform for MMUF students to apply for other prestigious awards. To date, six UCT-MMUF students have also become recipients of the Mandela-Rhodes Fellowships awards (UCT MMUF Programme Annual Report, 2014).

### **MMUF as an Equity Development Initiative at a Historically White University**

In considering the above achievements of the MMUF programme, attention also needs to be directed towards its location within UCT, a historically White university. An examination of how Black students react to, perceive and internalise the MMUF space within this location becomes important for evaluating the transformative ideals that have been envisaged. This is especially so in the South African higher education arena where post-apartheid restructuring led to a number of mergers between institutions which have very different student profiles. Although UCT has not been part of any merger, much emphasis has been placed on increasing the number of Black students entering and graduating from the institution. Increasing access to non-traditional, first generation Black students has highlighted the large amount of disparity amongst the UCT student body in terms of schooling backgrounds, English language proficiency, academic preparedness, financial status,

residential location, and so forth. The category of race (and recently also class) seems to underline much of these disparities.<sup>8</sup>

The yearly SA-MMUF student intake has also come to represent elements of the types of disparities mentioned above; only in this case such disparities exist solely between Black students. This in itself is highly significant for examining how these students navigate an MMUF context which is geared towards empowering them to make a difference as positive role models, especially within historically White university settings. This raises important issues about the manner in which these students construct narratives of self-identity and how these are translated and represented. Constructing such identities often forces them to confront competing and even contradictory notions of what it means to be a non-White South African.<sup>9</sup> There seems to be an underlined ideological imperative inherent in the MMUF programme that is not only reflexive in nature but also creates possibilities for students to take ownership of their life choices.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I present the MMUF space as an influential component of UCT-MMUF student identities. One of the arguments put forward here is that the transformative dimensions inherent in MMUF allows (and even forces) students to act, question and reflect on their past experiences of race and identity in a democratic SA. This makes it possible for a more nuanced analysis to be undertaken of how these students' lived experiences have impacted the manner in which they construct and locate a sense of themselves in the world. This type of in-depth analysis of their identities, particularly of those specific moments and experiences that have shaped their constructions of being Black in a post-apartheid SA, is most suited for the qualitative case study approach adopted here.

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<sup>8</sup> See Paxton (2001); Kapp and Bangeni (2002); and contributions to the following edited volumes, based on the UCT context: Angélie-Carter (Ed.) (1998); Thesen and Van Pletzen (Eds.) (2006), especially the introduction and the chapters by Bangeni and Nomdo; also see the recent publication by Pym and Paxton (Eds.) (2013), especially the chapters by Pym, Scott, Paxton and Luyt.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, my earlier (Nomdo 2006) analysis of Black African UCT-MMUF students' representations of what it means to be a Black South African.



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## CHAPTER FOUR

### Methodology

#### Introduction

According to Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1993:97), the dynamic and exploratory nature of doing research means that one is constantly involved in the process of refining existing methodological approaches or constructing new ones to make the interpretive act a more in-depth, revealing and meaningful experience. In this chapter I explore the dynamic nature of qualitative research, the potential it offers and its applicability for exploring the meanings of human phenomena within their contexts. I have opted for a qualitative case study approach in which the post positivist paradigm is overlapped with critical theory and constructivist paradigms, to produce a specific form of naturalistic or qualitative enquiry. What is presented in this chapter is an overview of what such a methodological approach entails, and why it is suited for the type of research presented here. I pay particular attention to the objective, foundationalist stance adopted by positivism and its criteria of validity, replicability, and generalisability that have traditionally been used as the yardstick for assessing qualitative methodological research procedures. I show that these traditional positivist assessment criteria are found wanting for assessing interpretive qualitative research, with its non-foundationalist focus on the subjective experiences of subjects within a socially constructed reality. I make an argument for acknowledging the validity of qualitative case study procedures for sampling, collecting, and analysing data. Strategies such as triangulation and research authenticity, which are employed by qualitative case study methodology to ensure rigour in the research process, will also be examined. Qualitative case study methodology also advocates the use of content analysis as an approach to the sorting and analysing of data. In addition, the use of constructivist grounded theory is recommended to increase the interpretive intensity of the content analysis process, so that researchers can look beyond the surface nature of the data. I hope to show how constructivist grounded theory's focus on reality as being socially constructed through intersubjective relationships, can add value and enrich the research process for both the researcher and participant. At the same time I will offer some insights into the critiques that have been leveled against grounded theory. Both grounded theory and the qualitative case study

framework in which it is embedded, represent a hybrid of positivist and interpretivist approaches. I argue that a constructivist grounded theory approach can satisfy the requirements of rigour in qualitative enquiry.

## **The Qualitative Case Study: Form and Function**

### **Adopting a qualitative approach**

The research presented here is qualitative in nature and draws on both critical theory and constructivist paradigms. As a 'system of understanding', research paradigms define the nature of enquiry along three lines; namely, ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999). Based on the underlying research epistemologies of critical theory and constructivism, the philosophical perspectives employed here are interpretive and critical in nature. This is an important acknowledgement, since not all qualitative research is necessarily interpretive, as is the case when one employs a positivist philosophical orientation (Myers 1997). Building on this, Myers (1997) argues that specific qualitative research methods, such as case study, are not dependent on the researcher's philosophical position, in that a case study can employ either a positivist, an interpretivist, or a critical stance. Within the interpretivist position occupied in this thesis, the ontology (nature of the reality) comprises people's subjective experiences of the external world. The understanding of reality under interpretive theory<sup>1</sup> is a phenomenological one in that reality is filtered through to us via our senses and our mental structures, making it a philosophical orientation. Giddens' (1991) view on the other hand, is that an individual's ability at maintaining a sense of ontological security is an important prerequisite for coping with life's everyday stressors. Ontological security is viewed here as a psychological state, a personal experience of feeling safe. Such ontological security allows individuals to create a sense of normality and continuity in their everyday lives, through interacting with others. To complement this ontological stance, an intersubjective epistemological position is taken up here, which draws on interactional and interpretive methodological techniques, such as interviewing and participant observation. According to the constructivist paradigm, reality is socially constructed through discourse. A critical and more 'skeptical' epistemology towards the construction of reality is adopted through employing techniques such as deconstruction and textual analysis, to show how discourses construct

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<sup>1</sup> See David's (2010) discussion of Weber and Schutz's work in relation to this.

reality and make specific sets of practices dominant over other practices in certain contexts (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999; Kelly 1999). The combination of critical theory and constructivism thus makes for more nuanced and enriched qualitative research. Kelly states that 'The combined effort of these two orientations... take shape in the form of a critical, dialogical and creative interpretive practice' (1999:399). The fact that paradigms in the social sciences often 'coexist' (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999:7) offers support for the combined use of paradigms and philosophical orientations adopted in the study presented here.

Qualitative research pays particular attention to the ways in which meaning is developed within particular contexts. According to Locke, Spirduso and Silverman, qualitative research:

Is a systematic, empirical strategy for answering questions about people in a bounded social context... The working assumption is that people make sense out of their experiences and in doing so create their own reality. In qualitative research, understanding both the content and construction of such multiple and contingent realities is regarded as central to the question, 'What's going on here?' (1993:99)

Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1993:100) speak of qualitative research as descriptive (in terms of recorded word texts that serve as data), analytic (the data needs to be organised and displayed) and also naturalistic (the data is obtained by entering the context of the participants without intervening therein). In this regard theory acts as a basis for explaining data, inductively.

It is also important to acknowledge the dynamic nature of qualitative research in terms of its mobility and ability to track changes over a period of time (Schofield 2000), for example, a qualitative study which traces the experiences of mature, Black, working class students over a three year period in a historically White university in SA. The manner in which the aforementioned students are located within the institution, their relations with faculty and other students and the institution's stance towards issues of race, class, diversity, equity, access and so forth, have a direct bearing on assessing the impact of higher educational experiences in these students' lives. Studies such as these also require an assessment of these students' experiences and attitudes towards the issues mentioned above, *before* entry into the institution. Their home, family and schooling experiences would feature quite strongly here. Schofield (2000:84) emphasises that establishing the stance or positioning of a person or institution at a particular



stage of entry is crucial for analysing how things ‘evolve over time’. As such, qualitative research is not a ‘snapshot’ image.

Schofield’s (2000) insights drawn from her own work on school desegregation systems are useful here (see Schofield 1979; Schofield and Sagar 1977). She reminds us about the importance of selecting the correct research site and the amount of caution that should be taken when generalising findings to other seemingly similar sites, as the latter come with their own make-up and institutional capital. A central criterion in her approach in these schools was to focus on and evaluate those conditions under which positive outcomes *were expected to happen* in the desegregated educational setting. This focus allowed her to incorporate a number of variables into her study and made for a much more nuanced and systematic approach to the issue being investigated. Drawing from this type of reasoning, I would argue that my selection of the MMUF programme at UCT as a research site, with its ideals of fostering and nurturing promising Black students into becoming academics, overlaps with some of the broad educational aims that Schofield had in mind, in that both pay attention to the particular contexts in which positive outcomes are expected. Increasing access to non-traditional Black students has highlighted the large amount of disparity amongst the UCT student body in terms of schooling backgrounds, academic preparedness, financial status, residential location and so forth. The category of race seems to underline many of these disparities<sup>2</sup>. The yearly MMUF student intake has also come to present much of the types of disparities mentioned above; only in this case such disparities exist solely between Black students. As an equity development space, the marker of race acts as a gatekeeper into the SA MMUF programme. The MMUF students’ confrontation with issues of race allows for a more nuanced analysis to be undertaken of some of the experiences underpinning their identity construction processes. I draw on a number of these experiences and present them in this thesis. This type of in-depth analysis of those experiences that have shaped these students’ constructions of being Black in a post-apartheid South Africa, fits well into the overarching qualitative framework and methodological approach adopted here.

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<sup>2</sup> See contributions to Angélie-Carter’s (1998) edited volume; Paxton (2001); Kapp & Bangeni (2002); Thesen & van Pletzen (Eds.) 2006; and Pym & Paxton (Eds.) 2013 for insight into how race impacts Black student experiences at UCT.

In utilising the aforementioned qualitative framework, I draw on a combination of some of the major types of qualitative research methods, namely, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory. These methodological approaches to qualitative research, although distinguishable from each other, also tend to overlap in terms of purpose and function and allow for an element of flexibility that enriches the research process. In what follows, I present an overview of two types of qualitative research methods mentioned above, namely ethnographic and case study approaches. I touch briefly on grounded theory as well, but deal with this issue in some detail towards the end of this chapter, when I discuss it as a particular approach to coding and analysing data.

### ***Defining Ethnography***

One of the methodological approaches I draw on in this thesis is ethnographic in nature, and I use multiple research procedures in the process, which include observation, interviewing, transcribing interview data, documentary analysis, and life history.<sup>3</sup> In so far as ethnographic techniques can be utilised by any researcher, it is the focus on the 'sociocultural interpretation of the data', the 'analytical descriptions or reconstructions of participant's symbolic meanings and patterns of social interaction' that sets apart the simple use of ethnographic techniques from an ethnography (Merriam 1988:23). Broadly speaking, the focus of ethnographical study is on the ways in which culture and symbols manifest themselves in behaviour within specific contexts (Punch 1998). Schofield (2000:81) puts it quite aptly when she states that 'ethnography... implies an intensive, ongoing involvement with individuals functioning in their everyday settings'. The ethnographic approach, in other words, is most suited for situations which require a:

Way of gaining insight into a culture or a social process, particularly those in complex behavioural settings, and particularly those involving other cultures and sub-cultures, including those of organizations and institutions. (Punch 1998:162)

The approach adopted in this thesis is therefore suited for exploring issues around the impact of broader social phenomena on the identity construction process of individuals within higher educational learning environments. My focus is on how critical events and experiences result in what is referred to as 'fateful moments' (Giddens 1991), a process whereby the 'protective cocoon', which houses an individual's sense of self, location, purpose, and direction in the world, is disrupted or shattered, resulting in ontological

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<sup>3</sup> Silverman (1993) and Punch (1998) provide useful and practical explanations of data collection techniques and procedures.

insecurity. Individuals employ various strategies for rebuilding the protective cocoon, so as to restore a sense of normality and ontological security in the world. The consequences of 'fateful moments', can both restrict and create possibilities for enacting and constructing various identities. The aim in this thesis is to examine how three Coloured MMUF students deal with the consequences of their respective 'fateful moments'. The equity development nature of the MMUF award has necessitated an approach in which the lived experiences of MMUF students have to be taken seriously, especially in light of immediate contexts such as home and school, in which such experiences unfold. It is my contention that the contexts in which these Coloured MMUF students' construct their perceptions of being South African (an ontological orientation), are inextricably linked to broader socio-economic and political phenomena. These expressions of identity are embedded in SA's long history of racial segregation, and by extension, class and cultural segregation, all of which continue to play a significant role after two decades of democracy. I therefore engage in what Geertz (1973) has identified as 'thick description'. An apt summary of the meaning of 'thick description' is offered by Grix:

Here, social phenomena are traced back to their origins in detail, by reconstructing specific events and using a wide variety of sources – which in some cases may be cross checked with one another, or triangulated – to arrive at a plausible 'description' of the chosen subject of study. (2004:121)

As an ethnographic tool, thick description directs attention to the 'values recognised in the behavior and language of the people being studied' (Stake 1995:42). As a major type of qualitative research, adopting an ethnographic approach towards the MMUF site would concern itself with the location of such a site within the university setting and also the socio-cultural context of that location. Of course, this needs to be viewed within the wider South African historical context where an impact assessment needs to be made of how broader racial and socio-economic factors structure attitudes, prejudices and possibilities amongst Black SA MMUF fellows. This is especially important when these students are confronted with issues of equity, transformation and racial representation within academia. It has already been stated that the explicit focus on three MMUF students' 'fateful moment' experiences in this thesis requires thick description. However, after applying this intense focus on each individual it became apparent that a much more focused qualification of the type of ethnography involved was needed. To satisfy this need, I have turned towards another major approach to qualitative research, namely case studies.

### ***Defining Case Study***

The use of case studies within the discipline of Sociology concerns the manner in which societies are constructed and socialised. However, the term 'case study' is one which conjures up a number of contesting, even controversial images in the minds of researchers, depending on the disciplinary field and form of academic enquiry in which it is utilised.<sup>4</sup> VanWynsberghe and Khan's (2007) overview of case study research reveals that more than twenty-five definitions of case study have been derived since the late 1970's. As such, it is difficult to think about the use of case studies in any standardised way since it is not 'used in a clear and fixed sense' (Hammersley and Gomm 2000; Merriam 1988). Recently, VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007) made a concerted attempt to highlight the similarities between dominant views in case study research. Through this exercise they have come to define a case study as 'a transparadigmatic and transdisciplinary heuristic that involves the careful delineation of the phenomena for which evidence is being collected (event, concept, program, process, etc.)' (2007:90). The authors' reference to 'transparadigmatic' implies that case study research is relevant regardless of one's research paradigm, while 'transdisciplinary' refers to the fact that case study can be used in any discipline. The term 'heuristic' implies an approach whereby particular attention is given to the phenomenon being studied. Much of their analysis refers to the works of some core case study and qualitative research theorists, some of whom I have also drawn on in this section, such as Merriam (1988), Stake (1995), and Guba and Lincoln (1981).

In terms of differentiating between types of research designs, case study research is labeled as 'nonexperimental' or 'descriptive', as it draws on facets of 'description and explanation' (Merriam 1988). Although experimental research also makes use of relatively few cases which can be explored in great detail, it contrasts with case studies in that:

it involves direct control of variables... whereas case study researchers construct cases out of naturally occurring social institutions... it (often) implies the collection of unstructured data, and qualitative analysis of those data. (Hammersley and Gomm 2000:3)

Although survey and historical research also forms part of descriptive research, they do differ from case study research. A descriptive case study is more inductive with variables been identified in the research

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<sup>4</sup> See Walker's (1986) 'Three good reasons for not doing case studies in curriculum research' and Miles's (1979) 'Qualitative data as an Attractive Nuisance' for some insights into some of the problems associated with qualitative research methods.

process itself (Merriam 1988). Histories deal with past events and the history researcher here lacks the ability to incorporate 'direct observation and systematic interviewing', a restriction not suffered by case study research (Merriam 1988:8). Social surveys on the other hand, can involve a large number of respondents from whom a relatively small amount of data is collected. In contrast, a case study is normally associated with an inquiry into 'a few cases, often just one, in considerable depth' (Hammersley and Gomm 2000:3). The terms 'collective case study' (Stake 1995), 'multicase study' (Merriam 1988) and 'multiple case psychobiographies'<sup>5</sup> (Isaacson 2005) are used when a number of cases (for example, a number of teachers) are used to explore the same research question or issue. The process of analysing data remains the same as that undergone by a single case study. The qualitative nature of this type of research places emphasis on unpacking 'meaning in context', a task which draws on human abilities to interview, observe and analyse (Merriam 1988). As such, Merriam makes a strong argument for recognising 'qualitative case study... as a research design in its own right' (1988:5) and locates it as one of a number of reliable and established designs geared towards systematic research.

An added criterion for selecting case study research also depends on whether a 'bounded system' (Smith 1978 cited in Merriam 1988) forms the core of the investigative analysis. Such a bounded system can take the shape of a 'program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group' which is selected as a site of study to gain a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of how it works in the search for 'holistic description and explanation' (Merriam 1988:9-10). Merriam goes on to say that 'the case is a single unit or bounded system within which there may be numerous situations, participants, events or phases of a process' (Merriam 1988:52). This notion of a single unit of analysis, described as 'the phenomenon for which evidence is collected,' has received specific attention from VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007). In attempting to refine the relationship between the case and the unit of analysis, these authors suggest that a process of 'delineation' must occur in the unit of analysis to gain sufficient insight and understanding about the case. VanWynsberghe and Khan state this as follows:

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<sup>5</sup> Psychobiography is viewed as a 'diverse and evolving methodology' and accommodates theoretical and analytical approaches from personality-social psychology. Psychobiography is geared towards 'identifying the specific psychological patterns within individuals and the dynamics between individuals and their environments'. Multiple case psychobiographies mostly rely on comparison and are able to provide 'complete psychobiographical analyses' of the life of each individual and can also 'move beyond each life to draw comparisons between subjects' (Isaacson 2005:104-105; 108). See contributions to Schultz's (2005) edited volume and Fouché and van Niekerk's (2010) overview of the development of psychobiography in SA.

Our definition of case study has led us to suggest that case study is not exclusively about the case revealing itself as it is about the unit of analysis being discovered or constructed. This is an important development because it means that researchers cannot definitively state the unit of analysis at the outset of the research; it must come into focus as the research progresses.

(2007:90)

To illustrate this, the authors use the example of a defence attorney, who in the process of defending his client is able to draw on a host of evidence, including the 'life history... the mental state... circumstances of the crime... the networks and associations of the accused...' and so forth. According to the authors a specific type of relationship between the selected piece of evidence and the unit of analysis is conveyed here:

If the lawyer chose to focus on the networks and associations of the accused, for example, the case could be 'a case of the scapegoat' which illustrates how the accused was only following orders as part of a larger criminal network. If the lawyer chose to focus on the life history of the accused, the case could be 'a case of childhood trauma' and criminality. As evidence continues to be gathered in the construction of this case, the unit of analysis is further delineated, and the case becomes more refined. (VanWynsberghe and Khan 2007:87)

This refining process is an important element of the research procedure outlined in the thesis presented here. Merriam (1988:16-17) asserts that qualitative research is foremost concerned with understanding 'the *meaning* of an experience' within a world in which there exists 'multiple realities... highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting'. The act of listening to the story of the case and interpreting and retelling such a story is complex, since meaning can be lost in translation, so to speak. Nevertheless, as we listen to these stories 'we enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn' (Stake 1995:40). Miller and Glassner (1997:111) state similarly that attention must be directed at the production of the stories 'and how we can put them to honest and intelligent use in theorizing about social life'. This fits in well with qualitative research's emphasis on directly interpreting texts, as espoused by the likes of Guba and Lincoln (1982) and Eisner and Peshkin (1990).

As a form of naturalistic or qualitative enquiry, case study research is traditionally located within the post positivist paradigm of the social sciences. Such a location tends to limit and restrict the researcher's involvement with respect to collecting and analysing data, and detracts from the qualitative model adopted here. I will draw on White et al.'s (2009) analysis of ethnography and case study to say more about this later. In the meantime I will simply state that the theoretical underpinnings of the particular qualitative case study methodology that I employ in this thesis are of a 'substantive' nature (Merriam 1988), owing to its embeddedness in actual life experiences of individuals operating within very particular contexts. Substantive theory is concerned with practice and has been viewed by Glaser and Strauss (1967 cited in Merriam 1988:57) as being 'grounded in the empirical world'. In this sense qualitative case studies are also in the business of developing and building theory. Adopting such an inductive approach to case study research means the researcher is not restricted to a limited set of variables, opening up space for discovering new and dynamic relationships in the data (Merriam 1988). However, every researcher approaches a study with some type of theoretical assumption or, as Riley (1963 in Merriam 1988:59) asserts, 'organizing image of the phenomenon to be investigated'. In this way, existing theory becomes the basis for developing new theory in so much as it is used 'to line up what one takes as theoretically possible... with what one is finding in the field' (Glasser and Strauss 1967:253). This indicates a more abstract layer of analysis that goes beyond the mere description of a case, and involves deriving more conceptual categories from the data with the aim of developing theory that explains aspects of the data. Such theory emerges from the data and is called grounded theory, a qualitative methodological approach developed by Glasser and Strauss in 1967. Much more will be said about grounded theory towards the end of this section, with specific reference to the constructivist grounded theory model developed by Charmaz (2000), as it is one that I have incorporated for a more in-depth analysis of my case study data. Charmaz (2006) argues contrary to the idea of an emergent theory put forward by Glasser and Strauss above, and asserts instead that theory is *constructed* from the data. In this thesis I emphasise how meaning is co-constructed within social contexts, which links strongly with Charmaz's approach.

There are important points in need of consideration when embarking on qualitative case study research which employs grounded theory. These usually refer to those issues of causal and theoretical analysis that will be explored. This includes finding answers to 'how' and 'why' questions (Yin 1984 cited in

Merriam 1988:9) through systematic analysis in which ‘thick description (is) expected’ (Stake 1995:43). This is particularly relevant in contexts where variables cannot be easily identified and controlled. Stake (1995:xi) asserts that it is ‘the particularity and complexity’ attached to various cases that makes it interesting, and makes us want ‘to hear their stories’. The qualitative case study can also take on an ‘instrumental’ dimension which allows for deeper understanding of particular phenomena that extends beyond the case itself (Stake 1995), a point which has been alluded to earlier with respect to psychobiography (see Isaacson 2005 in footnote 5 of this chapter).

***Unpacking the ethnographic versus case study debate: Moving towards an inclusive case study model***

White et al.’s (2009) review of some of the methodological challenges which emerged from their analyses of school children’s’ experiences of living with chronic illness, offers some meaningful insight into the distinctions and overlaps between case study and ethnographic approaches. In their research they adopt a postmodern feminist perspective so as to acknowledge their own contextual locations in the analyses of their subjects’ experiences. In the process of conducting their research they raise the question of why they were favouring their work in terms of a series of case studies and not as ethnography (White et al. 2009). In response to this question the authors reviewed four perspectives on case study, namely, that cases are found, are objects, are made, and are conventions. While each of these perspectives locates case studies in different ways, White et al. (2009) conclude that any of these perspectives could be found to be operating within their own study. Drawing on Stake’s (2005) distinction between three types of case study they further conclude that their research satisfies two of these types, in that it is an instrumental and collective case study. They recognise that the challenge in trying to make sense of how exactly to define their research methodology was in fact a paradigmatic issue, and by drawing on Guba and Lincoln’s (2005) location of paradigms, they conclude that:

case study appears to belong at the conservative end of the qualitative research continuum in ‘post positivism’, while ethnography spans their ‘critical theory et al.’, ‘constructivism’ and ‘participatory’ paradigms. (White et al. 2009:21)

Unpacking the implications of these paradigmatic locations implies that a post positivist case study does not favour the subjective involvement of the researcher in the research process, opting for maintaining a distance between the researcher and the researched, so as not to spoil and contaminate the data.



Ethnography on the other hand opts for much more researcher involvement, and views the researcher as an important contributor to the meaning making process. In this instance White et al.'s (2009) feminist perspective tends to occupy a position to case study methodology which is contrary to Stake's (2005) post positivist position. The former draw instead from Merriam's (1988) approach to case study methodology which I have outlined earlier. Merriam's approach is described as incorporating critical and interpretive components, making use of inductive and heuristic approaches and the use of thick description. While there are differences between case study and ethnography, Willis (2007 cited in White et al.) argues that the similarities between the two methodological approaches outweigh their differences. Operating from within an interpretivist framework Willis (2007 cited in White et al. 2009:21) asserts that 'researchers do not seek to find universals in their case studies. They seek, instead, a full, rich understanding (verstehen) of the context they are studying'.

In trying to get to grips with the merits of ethnography, Willis (2007 cited in White et al. 2009:22) asserts that ethnography is a 'means of gathering data in authentic (e.g., real-world) environments... [that] puts the researcher in the settings that he or she wants to study'. Guba & Lincoln (2005 cited in White et al. 2009:23) contrast post positivist's focus on validity, reliability and objectivity, with ethnography's focus on 'trustworthiness and authenticity, including catalyst for action'. There is thus a strong transformational component in the ethnographical approach (I will say more about this later in the chapter). White et al. (2009) thus favour ethnography since it pays attention to everyday phenomena and the ways in which such phenomena construct reality. Their postmodern feminist perspective makes them especially appreciative of the way in which ethnography is able to give voice to the marginalised. They also draw on the highly 'contextual nature of case study research' to inform the ways in which they approach and develop understanding about 'contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts' (Meyer 2001 cited in White et al. 2009:25). Thus by incorporating the ethnographic criteria mentioned above within a critical interpretivist case study framework, they are able to immerse themselves in the research process and can shed much more light on the experiences of their subjects. This enables them to validate their use of case study methodology. This call for an integrated methodological approach is one that will be taken up in this thesis.

The above discussion allows for a particular undertaking which incorporates a more accurate overview, description, and interpretive analysis of the data presented in this thesis. The three students who have been selected to participate in this research are each recognised as individual cases, making this a collective case study. Each student is regarded as a unit of analysis, a bounded system. The issue or phenomenon being investigated is the concept of a 'fateful moment' and how such a moment emerges and impacts the identity construction process in the lives of each of the students' presented here.

Of particular significance is the fact that each of the research participants is a recipient of a MMUF award. The MMUF space provides an important structural framework for gathering, sorting and analysing the data presented in this thesis. This space has previously been shown (Nomdo 2006) to be a strong stimulus for critical reflective engagement around issues such as race, identity, class, gender, and intellectual activism. The aforementioned research concluded that the students drew quite strongly on their MMUF experiences and used it as a critically reflective lens in the retelling of their life histories. Building on this research, what is presented in this thesis is an attempt to show how 'fateful moments' unfold and impact the identity construction process in the lives of three MMUF students, all of whom are regarded as 'Coloured' in terms of the university's statistical reporting on student profiles. This differs with respect to my earlier study (Nomdo 2006), which dealt only with Black African (Zulu and Xhosa) MMUF students' experiences. The data being presented here is therefore also a problematising of viewing Colouredness in terms of Blackness in a post- apartheid South African setting, and what these classifications mean to each of the students' presented here.

By drawing on aspects of ethnography (and also grounded theory), the qualitative case study approach adopted here is guided by interpretive and evaluative analysis. We can conclude that the essential components of a qualitative case study can be identified as follows. Firstly it is 'particularistic' in terms of what it focuses on. Qualitative case studies are able to 'concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation' (Shaw 1978 cited in Merriam 1988). Secondly it comprises 'thick description' (Stake 1995) which entails 'interpreting the meaning of... demographic and descriptive data in terms of cultural norms and mores, community values, deep-seated attitudes and notions, and the like' (Guba and Lincoln 1981:119). Thirdly, qualitative case studies are 'heuristic' in its ability to reveal new knowledge, build upon existing knowledge or to offer

some confirmation of the knowledge that already exists about the particular case. And fourthly, qualitative case studies are 'inductive' in terms of uncovering new relationships and modes of thinking about a particular issue. As such, qualitative case study differs from casework, case method, and case history; although the latter can form part of case study research with respect to recounting someone's past (Merriam 1988). VanWynsberghe and Khan's (2007) extensive analysis and critiques of what constitutes and defines a case study have also shown the broad scientific applicability and relevance of qualitative case study research. Their definition, which has been noted earlier, emphasises the flexibility and adaptability of case study research to effectively operate across paradigms and disciplines.

## **Sampling**

Merriam (1988) draws on Honigmann (1982), Chein (1981) and Patton (1980) to reassert the suitability for using non-probability (for example, purposive) sampling in qualitative research. Goetz and LeCompte (1984 cited in Merriam 1988:48) refer to this type of sampling as 'criterion-based sampling', since the researcher determines the criteria which are necessary for inclusion in the study. Samples that satisfy these criteria are then sought. A particular type of criterion-based sampling strategy is 'unique-case selection' (Merriam 1988). The decision for selecting samples in this category is dependent on the uniqueness or unusualness of the population, and these unique features form the basis for understanding the complexity of the case (Stake 1995). In this instance, the MMUF programme is indeed unique in drawing a diverse group of high achieving Black students from different disciplines and faculties together into one space, to interact and explore as a group what it means to be a Black academic within the higher education setting.

The research participants in this thesis form part of a designated group within UCT. As part of the commitment towards improving issues of access and redress for those previously disadvantaged by the apartheid regime, UCT aligns itself with S37 of The Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997, which states that its admission policy 'must provide appropriate measures for the redress of past inequalities and may not unfairly discriminate in any way'. In order to be in a position to identify previously disadvantaged South African students the university has developed 'redress categories', comprising Black, Coloured, Indian, and Chinese students. These different categories are symptomatic of the huge disparities that were imposed by the apartheid state to enforce separatist policies. The university puts its

redress measures in place for students who identify with any of these 'redress categories'. Such identification by race is part of the statistical reporting procedures required by the Department of Higher Education and Training (University of Cape Town 2012; Department of Education 1997). The distinction between 'redress categories' is important, and adds a level of complexity to the term 'Black', which uniformly encompasses the entire redress category range. The three students that have been selected here are all therefore recognised as being historically disadvantaged, given the systematic process of disenfranchisement suffered by all people of colour under the oppressive apartheid regime. The use of the term 'Coloured', which I will retain to differentiate Coloured students from Black African students, therefore has particular socio-political and historical significance, both during and after apartheid.

My selection of the Coloured MMUF fellows for this study took place approximately seven months after their selection into the programme. All of them were approached individually about the possibility of participating in the study. A one-on-one meeting was held with each student to explain the general purposes of the research and to answer any questions they had concerning their involvement in the research process. They were given up to two weeks to respond to the request (even though each of them had already given their consent after the first meeting). After this period, e-mail correspondence was sent out to each student alerting them to the issues covered in the previous meeting and what would be expected of them. Upon receiving their responses to my e-mail, another face-to-face meeting was set up in which respondents were handed an official document to sign, thereby indicating their consent to participate and for any data gathered on them to be made available for the purposes of this research. As part of our agreement this contractual document further guaranteed the protection of their identities, through the use of pseudonyms. Initially five MMUF students were selected for participation in this study, and although data for each of them was collected and preliminarily analysed, only three participants were eventually selected for final analysis. This was due to the sheer volume of information that began unfolding through the data analysis process. The three students who made the final selection presented narratives that were not only richly textured with respect to experiences of racial and class identity, they were also sufficiently controversial and uncompromising in some of the stances they adopted towards their perceived sense of personal self and their South African citizenship status. This made the possibilities for comparison very attractive.

Upon completion of my analysis on each of the three students, I sent each of them their respective chapters, and invited any comments and critiques that they felt they wanted to make. Their responses to these chapters were extremely insightful and affirming of the manner in which they had been presented. My analysis gave them the opportunity to reflect in quite a significant way (judging by the depth and sophistication of the feedback they sent me) on the nature and extent of any changes that they may have undergone since the research was conducted. They also used my analysis to reconnect with a 'younger self' and to reaffirm, re-evaluate and even 'caution' (personal e-mail correspondence with research participant, February 2014) the younger self's perceptions and ideological grounding. It also allowed them the opportunity to engage critically with my analysis of the data and to rectify and place in proper perspective, when they felt the need, certain comments that they had made in the extracts cited. The feedback I received from the students gave me the opportunity to revisit and tighten up aspects of my original analysis, even if it was just to correct a term or a phrase that had been incorrectly transcribed from the interview data.

As part of their reviews of my analysis, I also afforded each participant the opportunity to come up with a name for him or herself in the thesis, something which they took to heart. A good illustration of this is one student who chose to be named after her maternal grandmother, since the latter was the only person who really acknowledged and accepted her for who she was and who she wanted to be, as opposed to the paternal side of her family who found her 'afro-centric features... undesirable' (personal e-mail correspondence with research participant, February 2014). While two of my research participants selected names for themselves the other participant requested that I use his real name, so as to retain the realness of his story and his journey of discovery. This was particularly significant in that this particular research participant had just taken up an academic post at a South African university at the start of 2014, and was quite keen to share his experiences presented in my thesis, in his new teaching and learning context. I was quite pleased by the gist of their general impressions of my analysis, which included statements such as, 'It reads mal (very well)'; 'It definitely is an accurate representation of what was going on at the time, interesting stuff!', 'It was absolutely eye-opening to see the sociological theory being applied to my story' (personal e-mail correspondence with research participants, February 2014). A core feature in all the participants' feedback was an acknowledgement of a strong sense of ownership of their narratives, as that which marked significant moments of personal change and transformation in their

lives. The above correspondence allowed for a strengthening of my qualitative analysis, thereby affording it more validity.

Another important motivating factor for the selection of this particular group of students can be seen against the backdrop of the impact of apartheid on Black education, with many Black South African students entering higher education with a fair level of academic under-preparedness. So despite the drastic increase in Black student numbers, graduation rates for these students have been extremely poor. Research done by Scott, Yeld and Hendry (2007) on the South African higher education sector reveals that by the end of 2004 the average graduation rates for Black students registered for professional and general degrees stood at only 28% and 33% respectively, after a five year study period. White students by comparison scored an average of 65% and 67%. In light of these statistics, attention is drawn to the three Coloured students presented in this study since they stand far outside the norm in terms of their academic prowess. They are further distinguished by the fact that Coloureds make up only about 9% of South Africa's national racial demographics, with only a small percentage of them being able to meet the entrance requirements for university study. Many of those that do enter university are hampered by a gross lack of academic preparedness.<sup>6</sup> In 2005 'well under 12% of the black and coloured 20-24 age groups [were] participating in higher education,' which signalled serious cause for concern in this area (Scott, Yeld, Hendry 2007:11). Participation at postgraduate levels (Honours; Masters; Doctorates) for the 2000 and 2005 periods showed the following statistics: Black African, 31%; Indian, 7.3%; White, 56.3%; and Coloured, 5.3%; which further indicates underperformance amongst Coloured students (Council on Higher Education, 2009:XXI).

The MMUF sample which I present in this thesis thus represents a small minority of Coloureds who are highly successful academic achievers and who have a vested interest in pursuing academic careers. This makes them particularly attractive as a research group within the higher education sector. For the purposes of distinguishing between African and Coloured students, as was stated earlier, I will be using the term 'Coloured' instead of the inclusive term 'Black', so as to show the heterogeneous nature of Black student identity within the South African higher education sector.

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<sup>6</sup> See Scott, Yeld, and Hendry's (2007) report for insight into this.

A possible drawback relates to the size of the sample (only three individuals), but the focus on thick description validates this type of selection. The basic criteria for the selection of the sample presented here are that: they are all South African citizens; they all live and have attended schools in the Cape Town area; all of them are classified as Coloured; at the time of selection they were all MMUF students in their third and final year of undergraduate study; and they are all high academic achievers who wish to become academics. Some of the significant differences amongst these students are as follows: two of them attended previously White high schools, while the other attended a Coloured school; all come from middle class homes, although one of them identifies strongly with a working class background; one student has a father who is an academic, and who worked at a 'Coloured' teachers' training college with a long liberation struggle history. In this sense I draw on VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007:85) who suggest that 'the similarities and differences found among the phenomena of interest in case study research enable the researcher to expand the scope of the theory that guides or emerges from the original case'. Both purposive and criterion-based sampling preceded the actual process of gathering and organizing data.

## **Data Collection**

### ***Observation, Reflective Essays, Interviews***

To ensure reliability and rigour, a multiple approach to data collecting, better known as triangulation, has been opted for in this research as it allows for the strengths of the various methods to complement each other while minimising their limitations (Denzin 1970 in Merriam 1988). Data collecting methods for this thesis includes observational accounts, reflective essays and interview sessions, which together constitute a form of 'methodological triangulation' (Kelly 1999:431).

Recorded observations were made of the students' interactions with other MMUF fellows within the structures of the programme. Through this method of data collection, students could be observed first-hand navigating the race and identity issues they were confronted with. In keeping with my research aims and interests, recorded observational data gave rise to particular issues and questions which could be pursued later as part of the interview process. The reflective essays form part of the formal application to

the UCT-MMUF programme.<sup>7</sup> The reflective essays were very revealing in terms of the insights they provided into the students' sense of location within the home, their transitions into school and university life, their aspirations, struggles and motivations. In the context of this research these reflective essays are regarded as being valuable sources, as 'they exist independent of a research agenda ... unaffected by the research process. They are a product of the context in which they were produced and therefore grounded in the real world' (Merriam 1988:109). The reflective essays were also partly autobiographical, as respondents described and reflected on particular experiences which they deemed to be a pertinent part of their life stories at the time. The data gathered thus contains quite personal accounts of the respondents' lives, offering the researcher useful insights into 'the inner meaning of everyday events' (Merriam 1988:111) and the 'climate of risk' in which such events unfold (Giddens 1991). The high degree of subjectivity contained in any type of personal reflective process is noted here, giving rise to questions of reliability and rigour (which will be dealt with in more detail later in this chapter). Intensive interviews were also held with each respondent and like the reflective essays, were largely autobiographical in nature. The interview data formed the third and main level of coding and analysis, as various questions pertaining to the observational data and the reflective essay could be explored here. The importance of the interview process as a site for constructing meaning through dialogue and as a tool for reflecting on observational and reflective essay data, needs to be underlined and will receive some attention later on in this section.

### ***Interpretive Participant observation***

Interpretive research places much emphasis on studying phenomena as they occur in their natural settings. This calls for an approach in which researchers become much more involved in the data gathering process, to the extent that they take on the status of participant observers and become immersed in the social settings they are studying. Participant observation is closely linked to ethnography, which focuses on studying how specific groups interact in constructing meaning in their worlds. This emphasis on the natural setting means that interpretive researchers conduct their observations in a far less structured way, interacting informally with those whom they are studying. It is,

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<sup>7</sup> Each student applying for the MMUF Scholarship is asked to write a personal reflection on either how their home environment/community has inspired them or on someone whom they hold in high regard, and who has played a major role in their lives.



as Angrosino (2005:736) puts it, ‘essentially a matter of interpersonal interaction’. This differs from the more structured observational approach adopted by positivists (Terre Blanche and Kelly 1999).

The applicability of observational methods has been highlighted by Angrosino (2005) who cites Adler and Adler’s (1994:389) claim that it forms ‘the fundamental base of all research methods’ within the social and behavioural sciences. There have been serious shifts from the traditionally held assumptions about the ethnographic enterprise of developing objective truth claims through conducting structured observations and maintaining a distance between researcher and subject. There is now a tendency to recognise the manner in which the location of the researcher interacts with the locations under scrutiny, in a dialogical and collaborative format which has led to ‘a greater personalization of the activities of the researchers’ (Angrosino 2005:732). In light of the shifts towards dialogue and collaboration between the researcher and those being studied, the traditional research assessment criteria of objectivity, validity and replicability ‘Is now simply one point on a continuum and not the unique voice of reputable social research’ (Angrosino 2005:734). Angrosino proposes that we refrain from thinking about observation as a method, and asserts instead that observation should rather be viewed as ‘a context for interaction among those involved in the research collaboration’ (2005:732).

For the purposes of this thesis, I have engaged in a series of ‘intermittent observation’ sessions (Terre Blanche and Kelly 1999). I have observed the research participants over a variety of MMUF related activities and workshops. These include the three day orientation workshop, where the MMUF fellows get to meet each other for the first time; the month-long stay at the MMUF Summer Institute at Emory University in Atlanta, where the UCT MMUF fellows and coordinators meet up with their American counterparts; the two week long UCT MMUF January Programme, where the South African MMUF fellows in turn act as hosts to their American counterparts, and the two day MMUF September conference, where second year SA MMUF fellows reflect on their two year journey within the programme. There are also a number of UCT MMUF academic and social activities which take place in-between. My position as an MMUF coordinator has made access to these sites, and in turn the students, fairly easy, which in turn has also made it possible for my participant observation role to be *invisible*.

As MMUF coordinator I am required to participate in the programme in terms of the following: reviewing applications and short listing; sitting on the selection committee; teaching; mentoring; facilitating; programme and curriculum design; conferencing; and report writing. The last activity is particularly important in terms of the criteria set out by the American-based MMUF funders. There are also on-going attempts to restructure and improve aspects of the programme in line with American MMUF institutions, and to build a strong regional South African collaborative between MMUF structures at UCT, UWC and Wits. All of the above has made my observer participant status within MMUF a critical part of my coordinating role. The MMUF students' awareness of my duties has simply been incorporated within their view of MMUF, making it part of a more routine process. I have, what Angrosino (2005) terms, 'membership identity'. What this arrangement has made possible is that I was able to consider possible research options before any formalised research questions were developed and conceptualised. This also meant that I had the opportunity to think carefully about whom to approach for participation in the study, given the nature of my interactions with students on the programme. This raises some ethical issues, which I will address towards the end of this section.

### ***Strategising around the interview process***

The interview process allowed for triangulation to be applied within each individual case study (Kelly 1999) in that I was able to, in my capacity as researcher and interviewer, assess if my perceptions of what I had observed and read in the reflective essays, were accurate or in need of refinement. For example, issues of race and identity, particularly Coloured identity, could be explored and compared, as well as the impact of 'fateful moments' on the construction of self-identity in each case.

The effectiveness of using interviews as a data collection tool for intensive case studies has been well established (Merriam 1988; Stake 1995). Merriam (1988:72) cites Patton (1980) in relaying the core purpose of interviews:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe.... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions... We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world – we have to ask people questions about those things.

As part of the preliminary planning for the interviews, the respondents<sup>8</sup> were reminded about the scope of the interview, which included gaining insights into their general perspectives of the MMUF programme and also unpacking their experiences of having participated in the MMUF Summer Institute in the USA. Part of the interview process also touched on their reflective essays handed in as part of their MMUF applications, and drew on general observations made by the interviewer about the respondents' locations within the home, school and university, as presented in the essays. All the respondents granted their consent for the interviews to be tape-recorded. There were instances where respondents became extremely emotional during the telling of their life stories, being visibly shaken and upset, even crying. At such times, respondents requested that the tape recording be paused so as to regain composure before continuing. There were no requests from any of the respondents to have anything edited or removed from interview transcripts. Some of the non-verbal cues, such as moving around on the seat and even moving the chair around, were noted after the interview. Notes were made about the respondent's emotional status during the interview, to complement any recorded data. By recording the respondents' emotional status, for example, if they cried or seemed unusually angry, I kept open the possibility for exploring issues that were hidden below the surface. What the respondents did not say or how they said things without being aware of what such things meant, allowed for the opportunity of unpacking the silences in the interview. It allowed me to have a closer look at what defined their discomfort and their emotional upheavals. This illustrates the merits of triangulation in that the interview in this instance is able to provide depth and add context to data obtained from observations and essays.

Semi-structured interview questions were used so as to allow the research participants to comment on their experiences of specific aspects of the MMUF programme. In the latter part of the interview a more unstructured approach was used to unpack aspects of the participants' home contexts and upbringings. This allowed for valuable insight into the participants framing of the world and their lived experiences therein, a sentiment echoed by Riessmann:

Human agency and imagination determine what gets included and excluded in narrativization, how events are plotted, and what they are supposed to mean. Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives. (1993:2)

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<sup>8</sup> The terms 'respondents', 'participants', 'research participants' and 'Coloured MMUF students' are all used interchangeably here. Also, I refer to myself in a number of ways in this chapter: in the first person, as 'the researcher' and as 'interviewer' so as to avoid repetition of the same term.

Riessman (1993) offers support for the value of personal narratives and asserts that research interviews are largely similar to storytelling. She pins down a definition of personal narrative as 'talk organized around consequential events... often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society' (Riessman 1993:3) (see also Bamberg's [2011] analysis of the effectiveness of the 'narrative practice approach' [small story research] to identity construction, in which he problematizes the issue of agency with respect to a 'person-to-world versus a world-to-person direction of fit'). As such, stories serve as 'A primary way [in which] individuals make sense of experiences' (Gee 1985 cited in Riessman 1993:4). In terms of her own research on narrative analysis, Riessman (1993) regards the construction of stories by respondents as an expression of 'authenticity', (a concept I unpacked earlier in chapter two). The manner in which the interviews were structured was to get the research participants to simply tell their stories about their experiences in the world. These narratives therefore formed an important part of obtaining authentic data.

Of further benefit to this research was Merriam's (1988) foregrounding of Paton's (1980) list of questions that effectively elicits a range of responses from participants during an interview. I used a number of these questions extensively, in various combinations. These include experience and behaviour questions, opinion and value-based questions, feeling-based questions, and background and demographic questions. Attempts were always made, however, to relate general issues to the research questions the researcher had in mind, so as to create a broader and fuller context for understanding the ideological positions taken by the participants towards aspects such as race, class, schooling experiences and so forth. The conversational flow created a relaxed atmosphere and dissolved a few of the formal conventions associated with interviews, allowing for student responses to be far less guarded, with some interviews lasting up to two hours. This indicates the depth of the research participants' investment in the interview process and in their willingness to relay things about themselves. This theme of investing in an identity is carried through very strongly throughout their narratives, especially in depictions of the struggles they face as Coloured students.

Due to my various capacities as researcher, MMUF campus coordinator and mentor, I was fairly well acquainted with the respondents by the time the interviews took place. I was part of their MMUF

selection committee and had spent a fair amount of time preparing them for their trip to attend the Summer Institute at Atlanta. As coordinators, my colleague and I accompanied the UCT students to the USA, and often played parental figure roles, given the foreign and outsider status of the UCT fellows at the Institute. In short, the coordinators became part of the reality that they were observing. This consolidated the relationships between the South African students and their coordinators and permitted the latter to be unobtrusively included in students' conversations and deliberations at the institute. This allowed for useful observations of the UCT students interactions with each other and with their American peers. Such observations were often voiced during my interview sessions with the research participants, who would then elaborate, confirm or dismiss these observations of their behaviour. In this sense the observations were not viewed as 'spying', but offered instead an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their own experiences in a much more nuanced way, revealing quite personal details of their lives in the process. In addition to the observations that were voiced, a detailed analysis of the content of the participants' reflective essays was also done as part of the preparation for the interviews. The data derived from the observations and the reflective essays made it possible for the interviewer to probe specific issues identified in the aforementioned data during the course of the interview. This allowed for a more in-depth conversation around both the semi-structured and unstructured questions raised in the interview process. In this way previously recorded material received further explanation and interpretation, generating a much thicker description of the data.

The intention of the interview was also to allow the data obtained to evolve from one context to another, such as from the participants school experiences to their experiences at university. Since a core aim of the data gathering process was geared towards identifying possible 'fateful moments' in the participants' narratives, I purposefully did not ask them to identify such moments during the interview, nor did it form part of the pre-interview discussion. The intention was to uncover such moments almost accidentally through the use of probing questions, and then also later in the sorting, processing and linking of the data, in its raw form.

### **Adopting an ethical stance**

Ethical considerations in research pertain to a level of standards that are enforced to govern the manner in which research procedures are conducted, especially when it involves human subjects. Ethics relates to

a particular code of conduct and calls into consideration the types of values we wish to draw from in order to justify how the research knowledge will be used (Angrosino 2005). Researchers who are immersed in the research context and who operate as members of such contexts possess the ability to do 'harm', even though research participants are interactively involved. The researcher continues to hold a position of privilege, especially with respect to how the research is written up and used. For this reason appropriate ethical standards must be employed. Angrosino and Pérez (2000 cited in Angrosino 2005), suggest that the use of 'proportionate reason' to establish a connection between social enquiry and some type of ethical structure. Proportionate reason is defined as 'the relation between the specific value at stake and the... limitations, the harm, or the inconvenience which will inevitably come about in trying to achieve that value' (Gula 1989 cited in Angrosino 2005:736).

The following three criteria are suggested as a guide for assessing ethical research frameworks: (a) the methods we employ must cause as little harm as possible in achieving our research goals; (b) we must ensure that there are no other less harmful ways of reaching our goals, while ensuring that the methods we employ allow for a thorough and effective outcome; (c) the methods used to answer our research question must not undermine the participants or phenomena under investigation. For example, one of my research outcomes is to show that the classification of Coloured amongst my participants, impacts on their sense of belonging and security in the world. If the methods I use tend to negatively portray my participants as weak and in need of rescuing, I may be undermining their confidence and trust in the research process. This calls for constant monitoring of our actions, where misconceptions need to be acknowledged and rectified along the way (Angrosino 2005).

I have tried as far as possible to incorporate the above ethical criteria within my research. When I met with the MMUF fellows about their participation in this research project, the purpose of adhering to ethical criteria when conducting research was explained to them, and I was able to draw on disciplinary fields from the Humanities and Sciences to make this explicit. We agreed on a particular code of conduct that would be adhered to in the carrying out of this research. To this effect the ethical criteria attached to the research proposal was also passed by the faculty *Research Ethics Committee*, who gave formal consent for the research to be conducted. I have applied the ethical principal of autonomy and have informed my participants of their rights, which include their right to withdraw and the protection of their

anonymity. I have made a concerted effort to protect the well-being of the research participants, and have avoided bringing up issues that made them feel uncomfortable (these were signaled to me during the interview process). In instances where I thought that certain silences could possibly be an indication of feelings of discomfort, I respectfully enquired whether I could pursue a particular line of questioning, before going down that path. The benefits of incorporating the strategies outlined here has a wide appeal for researchers interested in learning more about minority students in higher education. It also offers some useful insights into the ethics of developing mentoring relationships with students.

The ethical considerations that have informed the process of triangulation applied here, serves to make this a more rigorous qualitative research project. I close this section by reiterating what was said about triangulation at the beginning, namely, that triangulation makes it possible for the researcher to view a phenomenon from a variety of different perspectives, so as to enhance and sharpen the specific meaning being associated with that phenomenon (Terre Blanche and Kelly 1999).

### **In Defence of Validity, Replicability, and Generalisability in Qualitative Case Study Research**

Issues of validity, replicability and generalisability in qualitative research, continue to receive much attention. In terms of claiming scientific recognition and legitimation, interpretive methodologies have been viewed as being in a state of crisis (Lincoln and Denzin 1994). According to Angen (2000:379) the source of contention surrounding the validity issue stems from the tendency of applying the same validity rules used for quantitative research, to interpretive qualitative approaches. This state of affairs, she asserts, has given rise to two camps within qualitative research circles, each with a particular orientation to the validity issue: a positivist camp on the one end and an interpretivist camp on the other. All qualitative research (both interpretive and positivist) has often been classified under the interpretivist label without any indication of the distinctions which exist. This has meant that interpretivist claims for securing legitimacy have always been viewed in relation to the positivist stronghold over defining what such legitimacy constitutes (Jardine 1990 cited in Angen 2000). Angen (2000) compares positivist's principles of objectivity and 'certainty', which are rooted in the belief of a 'foundational basis of knowledge', with the 'lifeworld' concept underlining interpretive inquiry's

‘nonfoundationalism’ stance. Drawing on Jardine (1990) and Lincoln (1990), she concludes that interpretive research is too ‘fluid, contextual, and relational’ to allow for the degree of ‘certainty’ required by positivism’s ‘deterministic nature of the universe’ to be regarded as valid (Angen 2000:378-381). Viewing the validity debate from this angle implies that “positivist criteria should be viewed ‘as *particular* ways of warranting validity claims’ rather than continuing to be privileged ‘as universal, abstract guarantors of truth’” (Moss 1994 cited in Angen 2000:386). The interpretivist stance therefore, is that no single method or methods can claim the position of being the authority on validating knowledge claims (Guba and Lincoln 2005; Angen 2000). This places interpretive research on a direct collision course with positivist criteria of validity, reliability, and generalisability.

Schofield (2000) also unpacks some of these issues by paying close attention to the differences between qualitative and quantitative research procedures. Schofield’s (2000) review of the literature dealing with these issues in quantitative research (such as her analysis of Campbell and Stanley [1963]; and Smith [1975]) reveals that science places a great deal of emphasis on ‘internal validity’ and the ‘generalizability’ of findings. Merriam’s (1988) analysis of Ratcliffe (1983) cautions that any assessment of validity and reliability should take into consideration that data<sup>9</sup> is not a free standing phenomenon and that it is always acted upon by an interpreter. The interpreter, engaged in the process of interpreting, constructs particular meanings associated with his or her observations of the data, and not the reality of the data itself. Merriam (1988:167) further asserts that ‘What is being observed are people’s constructions of reality, how they understand the world.’ This is a core feature of qualitative case study research. Internal validity in this sense, she argues, concerns the researcher’s interpretation of the reality that is observed. In qualitative case studies we are confronted with the attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, bias, and sensitivities possessed by the researcher as the main tool of data collection and interpretation (Merriam 1988:33-34). These dispositions accompany researchers as they enter into dialogical relationships with their subjects, to produce meanings of reality that are socially constructed and negotiated. Gillet (1995 cited in Angen 2000) describes the interpretive researcher in this instance as being ‘sociohistorically embedded’ and intersubjectively involved in the process of creating meaning in the world, to produce what Angen (2000) calls ‘an aha experience’ in the minds of an audience. This type of analysis adds to the process of validation been outlined here.

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<sup>9</sup> I use the term ‘data’ here to refer to a mass noun, and not a count noun.



Intense involvement by the researcher has meant that qualitative research has often attracted criticism for being too subjective, but this very element of subjectivity has been signaled *not* as a weakness, but as 'an essential element of understanding' within qualitative research (Stake 1995:45). The absence of set protocols to be followed in case study research has also been criticised for making it overly dependent on the researcher's ability and tenacity to pursue avenues that may or may not be the correct ones (Merriam 1988). Merriam (1988:37) argues however, that this lack of set procedures in case study research is what makes it so attractive, since 'it allows the researcher to adapt to unforeseen events and change direction in pursuit of meaning'. Being able to deal with ambiguity in a sensitive manner is extremely helpful here. The consensus reached in surveying qualitative research is that the processes of triangulation, long-term observation, peer critiques of one's findings, clarifying researcher bias from the onset, and thick description, make up some of the possible strategies that can be used to ensure internal validity (Stake 1995; Merriam 1988).

Drawing on Merriam's (1988) analysis, the issue of reliability (the ability of findings to be replicated), is identified as a positivist criterion based on the assumption of a single, objective reality, which aims at discovering causal relationships between variables. The studying of a particular set of relationships within such a reality will continue to produce the same results. This assumption is the foundation of traditional experimental research, which aims to identify and link set variables to set actions, as a way of establishing laws that govern human interaction. Qualitative research on the other hand is interpretive in nature, and operates on the premise of a multiple and constructed reality, in which meaning about the world is constructed through peoples social interactions with each other, which are always dynamic. Meaning is therefore always in flux, always in process, and relative to the context in which it is being defined. The creation of meaning is therefore 'malleable', according to Bednarz (1985 in Merriam 1988) and stands in contrast to the positivist notion of a single, objective reality in which meaning can be fixed, and therefore replicated. In reaching consensus over the issue of reliability, Merriam (1988) reasserts that it is impossible to disentangle issues of validity and reliability in the research process, due to the extremely complex relationship that they share. This unavoidable link between internal validity and reliability is highlighted in a similar fashion by Guba and Lincoln (1981). They draw on this link as a basis for arguing in favour of using only the measurement of internal validity, and not reliability, in qualitative

research procedures since 'a demonstration of internal validity amounts to a simultaneous demonstration of reliability' (Guba and Lincoln 1981:120).

There has also been much debate about external validity (applying research findings in a generalised fashion to other contexts) in case study research. As an exponent of the experimental tradition, Krathwohl (1985 in Schofield 2000:71) emphasises the importance of replicability and states, 'The heart of external validity is replicability'. Krathwohl's measurement of external validity here concerns the extent to which research results produced in one setting, can be replicated in other settings, since this forms the basis for generalising research results. In comparison, Schofield (2000) argues that issues of generalisability, validity and replicability have traditionally not been awarded similar positions of importance in qualitative methodological literature. The literature dealing with qualitative research methods has tended to emphasise one or two of the aforementioned issues, while neglecting others, as attested to by Schofield's review of Dobbert (1982); Kirk and Miller (1986) and Berg (1989). Schofield (2000:70) concludes from this that there exists a general 'disregard of the issue of generalisability' in qualitative research methodology and asserts that the issue of generalisability is commonly viewed as 'unimportant, unachievable, or both'. She locates generalisability in qualitative research as follows:

Yet at the heart of the qualitative approach is the assumption that a piece of qualitative research is very much influenced by the researcher's individual attributes and perspectives. The goal is *not* to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issue would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation. Qualitative researchers... do not expect other researchers in a similar or even the same situation to replicate their findings... As long as other researchers' conclusions are not inconsistent with the original account, differences in the reports would not generally raise serious questions related to validity or generalizability.

(Schofield 2000:71)

In qualitative research, the collection and analysis of data is usually relevant to that particular moment. Research sites are therefore dynamic in nature, and changes occurring in the site can impact on the level and degree of analysis, which could result in variances in the findings. As such, findings at a specific moment in time may be difficult to generalise from at a later stage (Schofield 2000). Schofield does contend however, that in the qualitative tradition it is accepted that 'studies in one situation can be used to speak to or to help form judgment about other situations' as long as thick description is used to

ascertain 'the degree of fit' (2000:79) between different cases. The issues of generalisability and transferability raised here have been supported and illustrated by VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007). Other features that can improve generalisability involve making the typicality of the case well known (Goetz and LeCompte 1984 in Merriam 1988:177), and also by doing a cross-case analysis.

Kenny and Grotelueschen (1980 cited Merriam 1988) suggest as part of their review of the philosophical grounding of case study research that drawing extensively on phenomenology, hermeneutics and theory of tacit knowledge may not be what is needed to claim legitimacy for case study research. Instead, they opt for a pragmatic and historical approach. Pragmatism focuses on the application of case study research with respect to its applicability and suitability over other research designs for specific research sites. In terms of the historical, case studies have a 'latently historical nature' which can be analysed and explained within the context of the case itself. Merriam (1988:21) however, suggests that opting for a pragmatic or historical approach is secondary to 'reflecting on one's assumptions and making them explicit at the outset of a case study investigation'. She asserts that, 'rigor in a qualitative case study derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description' (Merriam 1988:120).

## **In pursuit of rigour**

I have approached the question of rigour by paying close attention to Guba and Lincoln's (2005) discussion on the use of specific authenticity criteria that can be used to validate rigour in qualitative research. The notion of authenticity has been described elsewhere in terms of the extent to which 'the reliability and verifiability' of a narrative representation of a particular occurrence, resembles the 'real details of the event' (Piantanida and Garman 1999:150). Guba and Lincoln (2005) identify the following elements as those which substantiate authenticity in constructivist research: fairness; ontological and educative authenticity; and catalytic and tactical authenticity. The element of fairness here alludes to attempts at ensuring that all participant voices are equally represented in the research process, with a form of balance that does not prejudice any of the narratives. Ontological and educative authenticity relates to increasing the awareness levels in research participants about how they construct meaning.

Attached to this process is the imperative to raise individuals' levels of understanding and empathy about those with whom they interact on a social basis. The elements of catalytic and tactical authenticities revolves around the ability of the research process to act as a stimulus for social and political action on the part of the research participants, as well as the researcher, to impact positive change and transformation in society.

The ethos of the MMUF programme and my extensive engagement with the research participants therein, have facilitated the incorporation of the authenticity criteria alluded to above. This type of direct involvement with the research participants is a source of contention for positivists, who view such action as that which detracts from the element of objectivity (Guba and Lincoln 2005). In defending this element of researcher subjectivity, Guba and Lincoln (2005:208) locate objectivity as myth, to be found only 'in the imagination of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower'. Milne (2005) builds on researcher subjectivity and draws attention to the importance of being aware of the ethics involved when interacting with research participants (this was discussed earlier). Milne asserts that such ethics guide the authentic behaviour of the researcher and assists the researcher in demonstrating to participants the value attached to the research that is being undertaken. In this sense the notion of authenticity also ensures that data collection methods adhere to the highest ethical and moral standards.

Milne's (2005) notion of how authenticity guides ethical and moral responsibility in research has strong overtones with Angen's (2000:387) notions of 'ethical validation and substantive validation'. The term 'validation' is used here (as opposed to 'validate') to show that 'a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research is a continuous process occurring within a community of researchers'. Since interpretive enquiry endeavours to unpack meaning in everyday life with 'thoughtfulness and care', it becomes strongly associated with the issue of morality, and thus falls within the scope of ethical validation. The issue of ethical validation also incorporates a strong element of fairness as indicated in Guba and Lincoln's (2005) authenticity criteria above, in which provision must be made to hear all voices in an equitable manner. Angen (2000) asserts that the two primary outcomes of ethical validation are that it must be generative and transformative in terms of purpose and function, which correlates with the criteria of catalytic and tactical authenticities outlined earlier. The generative component requires research to be a stimulus for promoting new insights and for opening new avenues of exploration

through dialogue within a community. Ethical validity also seeks to transform the manner in which research is traditionally conducted. It seeks to challenge 'prevailing authoritative regimes' and creates new possibilities for change (Angen 2000) through the adoption of 'a more cooperative approach between the researcher and researched' (Lather 1986a cited in Angen 2000:389). I have adopted this approach here. Earlier I indicated that I had afforded each of my research participants the opportunity to read and comment on my analysis of their respective experiences, and how I was able to incorporate their feedback into the research process. This has enabled me to confirm the validity of my research, thereby strengthening the qualitative basis of my analysis. In terms of substantive validation, the focus is on exploring the process through which understanding about a topic is reached. This includes a coherent account of 'present and historical, intersubjective understandings' about the topic being investigated (van Manen 1990 cited in Angen 2000:390).

Discussions about triangulation and authenticity remind us of the importance of ensuring rigour in qualitative research and have informed my approach to qualitative case study. Debates surrounding the issue of rigour continue to highlight the differences in approaches between positivists and interpretivists. Guba and Lincoln (2005) have shown how conventional research has ensured rigour through a mechanism of control that excludes the notions of voice, reflexive practice, and textual representation from the research process. These authors show how a different understanding of control is adopted by 'new paradigm researchers', such as critical theorists and constructionists, who view the issue of control in relation to the transformational effects of the research process. Guba and Lincoln (2005) use the debates generated around the notion of control to highlight that the wrong questions are often posed by positivist researchers with respect to rigour in interpretivist enquiry. They argue that rigour in interpretive research must be developed dialogically. As such, positivist questions about rigour in interpretive research 'have no meaning because the frames of reference are those for which they were never intended' (Guba and Lincoln 2005:204).

From the above discussions on validity, reliability, and rigour, it is evident that a huge responsibility is placed on the researcher as the medium or 'instrument' through which instances in the lived reality are conveyed. This level of commitment and investment on the part of the researcher 'requires researchers to have an intense personal involvement in the process' (Sanjek 1990 cited in Angen 2000:391).

## **The Role and Motivation of the Researcher**

A major criticism of grounded theory is leveled against Glaser and Strauss's (1967) assertion that the researcher doing grounded theory work should enter the field as a blank slate, without any preconceived notions about the research site and what could be derived from it. Other grounded theorists, such as Charmaz (1995; 2000), have challenged this assertion and have moved towards a more intersubjective stance between the researcher and the respondent, which acknowledges the impact made by the researcher on the research process. The approach adopted in the qualitative study presented here is therefore one that recognises the role that the researcher's own experiences, views and ideologies play in the research context, and the relationships that are constructed therein. What I present in this section is an indication of my own positioning with respect to the study undertaken here, in an attempt to reveal my own bias and assumptions which have informed and guided this enquiry. In doing so I hope to improve my own impartiality and secure 'a degree of scientific hardiness' (Jones and Alony 2011) for what is presented.

In my capacity as the UCT MMUF coordinator over the past twelve years, I have become very familiar with the MMUF space. I explored aspects of Black identity constructions amongst the first group of UCT MMUF students (Nomdo 2006), which served as the pilot project for this thesis. Coloured and Indian UCT students only joined MMUF three years after the programme was started, and this presented the opportunity to interrogate the construction of Coloured identity amongst MMUF students. Interest in pursuing this type of research stems from my own location as a product of the apartheid educational system, and relates to personal grappling of being classified as Coloured. Working as a coordinator in the MMUF programme has forced me to confront the conflicts and contradictions inherent in the construction of my own identity. As a previous recipient of postgraduate Mellon Foundation funding, I also felt certain closeness to the MMUF programme, in terms of the support I had received from the foundation. In addition, my appointment as a lecturer in the Academic Development Programme (ADP) at UCT meant that I had a vested interest in working with historically disadvantaged students on extended degree programmes.<sup>10</sup> Much has been written on these students' experiences at UCT.<sup>11</sup> In

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<sup>10</sup> Students on extended degree programmes are academically weaker than their mainstream counterparts, and take their undergraduate education over four years, as opposed to mainstream students who complete their degrees in three years.

addition to my ADP position, the role of MMUF coordinator presented an opportunity to explore the stories of successful Black academic achievers, Coloured students in this case. Doing this would enable me to add to the literature on Coloured student identities, particularly within the context of their minority status within the South African university spectrum.

An important issue for consideration that emerged from this research concerned the multiple roles that I played. The interview space discussed earlier served as a very important reminder of the different modes that individuals operate in across various settings, and revealed the extent to which specific types of relationships are played out in satisfying the conventions of those settings. This forced me to reflect very purposefully on my multiple roles as educator, researcher, MMUF coordinator, mentor, friend and observer in the research process embarked upon here. The impact of my various roles on the nature of the research process and the extent to which this influenced the manner in which this research was presented and formulated is thus an important component of what is outlined here. I am cognisant here of Giddens' (1984 cited in Jones and Alony 2011) notion of 'double hermeneutic', a type of bias which suggests that research participants, over a period of time, are prone to act in certain ways due to being influenced by the researcher and the type of research undertaken. The possibility therefore exists that research participants may say and do things which they deem valuable to the researcher, a type of bias known as 'the Hawthorne effect' (Landsberger 1958 cited in Jones and Alony 2011:103).

I have borne both these types of bias in mind and have tried to minimise them by drawing on certain types of data that were submitted by the students before they were selected for the study (such as their reflective essays which formed part of the application process to the MMUF programme). Some of the observational data also fell into this category, since my initial observations (prior to informing and selecting participants) were of *all* the students making up a particular selected cohort (comprising five MMUF students). Such observations were made in my capacity as MMUF coordinator. Also, I did not divulge anything to my respondents about wanting to identify 'fateful moments' in their lives. I framed my research in more general terms, relating it to their home, schooling and university experiences, and how notions of race evolved along the way. These broad research frameworks allowed them to speak

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<sup>11</sup> Pym and Paxton's (2013) edited volume is the most recent account of Black students experiences within the Commerce faculty's extended degree programme. This book is an excellent example of 'a case study of an effective education development initiative' (Dr Max Price, Vice Chancellor of UCT, cited in Pym and Paxton, 2013:x).

much more generally about their experiences, and the semi-structured interview process facilitated this even further.

Merriam's (1988) point about the central role played by the researcher in qualitative case study as the person who represents 'the primary instrument for data collection and analysis' offers some useful insights here. She cites Guba and Lincoln (1981) as follows:

The researcher as instrument is responsive to the context; he or she can adapt techniques to the circumstances; the total context can be considered; what is known about the situation can be expanded through sensitivity to non-verbal aspects; the human instrument can process data immediately, can clarify and summarize as the study evolves, and can explore anomalous responses. (Merriam 1988:19)

Interviewers themselves are thus 'unavoidably implicated' in the meaning making process. Both the interviewer and the respondent 'are necessarily and ineluctably *active*' (Holstein and Gubrium 1997:114). Based on the above it has been argued that interviewer bias and subjectivity is almost an inescapable phenomenon in contexts such as interviews where human interaction is the core component. However, Holstein and Gubrium (1995 cited in Holstein and Gubrium 1997) distance themselves from the conventional approach that regards interviews as 'a pipeline' and 'a source of bias'. Utilising an 'ethnomethodologically informed social constructionist approach', Holstein and Gubrium (1997) argue for a more balanced appreciation of the 'how' and 'what' questions in the interview, as these seek to address the knowledge making process. Here it is just as important to get to grips with 'how' respondents go about constructing knowledge, as it is to know 'what' is being conveyed. Put simply, the aim is 'to show how what is being said relates to the experiences and lives being studied' (1997:127). The position I adopt in this thesis is that meaning is always socially constructed, in relation to others.<sup>12</sup> My role as MMUF coordinator, interviewer and researcher is thus intricately linked, and being able to participate as an MMUF insider and adopt a critical outsider stance as interviewer and researcher, has enhanced the research process.

The argument put forward is that the insider relationship between the MMUF coordinator (who is also the interviewer and the researcher here) and the respondents is one based on mutual respect and trust. The coordinator in the carrying out of his duties has to signal the recognition of the respondents'

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<sup>12</sup> See Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), who offer useful insights into social constructionist methods.



capabilities and academic prowess; the respondents in turn need to recognise the coordinator's purpose in guiding and supporting them in their goals of embarking on academic careers. The nature of this relationship is grounded in a particular type of mentoring philosophy which views the mentee (and the mentor) as having the potential to change and transform the academy through critical intellectual engagement, marked as a cornerstone of the MMUF Programme's mission. My various roles as mentor, coordinator and researcher have given me added perspective into the lives of the MMUF fellows, both within and outside of the MMUF context. Adding to this perspective are my own experiences and challenges of living under the category of 'Coloured' on the Cape Flats; attending segregated schools; studying at a Coloured teachers' training college during the turbulent 1980's; and renegotiating my identity as a Coloured student and employee at UCT in a post-apartheid setting. These layers of perspectives have raised my awareness and sensitivities to the racial politics embedded in the social context of Cape Town, and have increased my empathic stance towards the identity narratives relayed by the research participants.

This display of empathy has gone a far way in complementing my role as interviewer and has bolstered my mentor-mentee relationship with the Coloured MMUF students. It has set up the groundwork for the depth of conversations that has emerged through the interview process. This empathic stance is important for interpretive analysis as it allows researchers 'to stay close to the data' (Terre Blanche and Kelly 1999:139). At the same time the researcher has to also employ 'the perspective of distancing' (Kelly 1999) to interpret experiences from the outside, so as enrich the process of understanding how others produce meaning in the world. Kelly points out that texts have a tendency to say much more than intended, and carry a 'surplus of meaning'. In order to gain access to such a surplus of meaning, researchers must not only have good insider knowledge about the phenomenon being studied, but must also occupy an outsider perspective. This viewing from the outside 'allows us to say more than can be known purely from within the author's context' (Kelly 1999:401). What is being stressed here is that an empathetic insider perspective as well as a distanced, interpretive perspective is needed to gain fuller knowledge about phenomenon studied in context (Ricoeur 1981b in Kelly 1999). Milne (2005:5) reminds us however, that adopting an empathetic approach can never really equate to 'walking in the shoes of others', given our varied life experiences. What an empathetic approach does achieve, Milne argues, is

to allow researchers to enter into meaningful relationships with research participants in developing a shared appreciation of the value that each will bring to the research process.

Beyond this mentoring relationship with my MMUF respondents, reside other mutually recognised criteria. The commonality of our backgrounds, in terms of cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, religious, class, and racial identification codes has created an added layer of familiarity which has allowed the respondents to tell their stories in the way that they have. My own insights into the finer nuances of issues associated with being Coloured and living on the Cape Flats, such as the role of religious grounding in many of the communities, some common stereotypical phrases of identification, references to games played, sentiments expressed about hair texture<sup>13</sup> and so forth, has also contributed towards creating a certain type of honesty and forthrightness between the respondents and myself. This type of relationship, one could argue, would not have been there if I was an unknown entity. In the course of the interviews conducted with the MMUF respondents, some laughed hysterically, cracked jokes, were roused to anger, became defiant, swore, smiled reassuringly and even openly cried as they reflected on their life experiences. Of course one is cognisant here of what Gans (1982 in Merriam 1988) refers to as a 'researcher participant' who operates as neither a full observer nor a full participator. With this in mind Merriam (1988:93) asserts that the researcher must recognise that the supposed insider status of 'Being born into a group... does not necessarily afford the perspective necessary for studying the phenomenon'. I have attempted to overcome some of these restrictions through establishing a solid basis for trustful interactions, so as to show that the depth and intensity of the respondents' reflections has allowed revealing glimpses into their lived realities. The telling of their life histories thus formed the bulk of the data collected and allowed for a very particular contextualisation of the 'fateful moments' which were identified.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative case studies draw on the use of content analysis to analyse data. The form of content analysis referred to here is one which operates as 'a systematic procedure for describing the content of communications' (Merriam 1988:116). A distinction is made between conventional content analysis and

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<sup>13</sup> See Erasmus (2007). She reflects on her own Coloured childhood and the role that hair texture played within her community in so far as it impacted the construction of Black as 'other'. She offers an analysis of 'hair politics' within SA.

the type of qualitative content analysis referred to in this research. Altheide (1987 cited in Merriam 1988:117) asserts that it goes beyond making the meaning of communication explicit, in that it is also used to 'verify theoretical relationships'. Altheide goes on to say that ethnographic content analysis is distinguished by "the reflexive and highly interactive nature of the investigator, concepts, data collection and analysis... The aim is to be systematic and analytic, but not rigid... categories and 'variables' initially guide the study, others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study" (cited in Merriam 1988:117).

The collecting and analysing of data is something that takes place concurrently in qualitative research. Analysis is built into the manner in which one observes and reads various texts and forms the basis on which one builds insights in the process of organising the subsequent phases of collecting and analysing the data. The intensity of the analysis increases once all the data has been gathered (Merriam 1988). The arranging, organising and consolidating of the data is an important process in that it prepares the data and makes it more accessible for intensive analysis (Merriam 1988). The aim is 'to come up with reasonable conclusions and generalisations based on a preponderance of the data' (Taylor and Bogdan 1984 cited in Merriam 1988:130).

In devising categories that have emerged out of the various phases of coding the data, I have followed Holsti's (1969) guidelines, as recommended by Merriam (1988:136) '... to judge the efficacy of categories derived from content analysis'. These guidelines have been used, amongst others, to evaluate the consistency of my categories with the research aims and the extent to which these categories retain their independence. I have arranged the data on each research participant into a largely descriptive chronological narrative, tracing their childhood up to the stages of being third year and Honours students. From here more concrete themes (such as relationships with parents; representations of Coloured identity; religious influences; issues of disempowerment; having a sense of belonging) and categories (such as home, school, university) were derived. The identification of possible 'fateful moments' in the data had already been made at this stage, since analysis and interpretation of the data is a continuous process. The tasks that remained were taken up by locating and linking particular 'fateful moments' within the designated themes and categories that had been identified thus far. This contextualising of the 'fateful moment' drew on the 'thick description' gathered on each research

participant, and allowed for a chronological biographical narrative to be written on each of them, thus making it possible to locate the timing and the circumstances around the 'fateful moment' more accurately. This type of identification in the data allowed for important insights into the nature and impact of the 'fateful moment' on the identity construction process, and the extent to which it transformed and consolidated each participant's sense of purpose and location in the world. By making the 'fateful moment' the central focus under consideration, other pieces of data which seemed to have a direct bearing on the 'fateful moment' could more accurately be identified through careful analysis. This aided in the selection of useful and relevant data sets from the mass of data collected, so that time could best be utilised analysing the most important data (Stake 1995).

The continued identification and classification of the data in this manner established the basis for a much deeper level of analysis in which to explore specific relationships between the various levels of coding. This type of cross-analysis moved the interpretation of the data to a level of abstraction whereby 'We are no longer dealing just with observables but also with unobservables,<sup>14</sup> and are connecting the two with successive layers of inferential glue' (Huberman 1984 cited in Merriam 1988:140).<sup>15</sup> The difficulty involved in this process relates to the manner in which we move back and forth between the concrete, descriptive aspects of the data and our abstractions and analysis thereof, which must be on-going so as to allow us to make an informed judgment about the future. In other words, we are engaged in a purposefully reflective process of analysis which allows us to speculate (Goetz and LeCompte 1984 in Merriam 1988) about possible theories that underline the phenomena identified.

## **Using a Grounded Theory Approach**

The type of grounded theory being used in this thesis draws on Charmaz's (2000) constructivist grounded theory model. This model employs critical and interpretive analysis so as to take seriously the

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<sup>14</sup> Gaining access to 'unobservables' can be achieved through methodological approaches such as discourse analysis, semiotic deconstruction and psychoanalysis. See for example Potter's (2012) outline and methodological stages of discursive psychology

<sup>15</sup> In terms of collecting, arranging and sorting of data, the qualitative case study approach adopted in this thesis overlaps with the process of 'serial iteration' used in psychobiographical methodology. Serial iteration develops 'separate data sets' as well as 'discrete idiographic hypotheses' for each individual case. This is followed by 'cross-comparison of hypotheses across subjects' (Isaacson 2005:105).

social reality and location of the subject, and demands a much more dynamic interrelationship between the researcher's and subject's perspectives, for the *construction* of meaning. This is quite a significant shift from traditional grounded theory analysis which posits that theory *emerges* from the data. Allen's (2010:1613–1614) critique of Charmaz's (2006) work on grounded theory shows that Charmaz 'assumes that neither data nor theories are discovered, but are constructed by the researcher and research participant'.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Defining a constructivist grounded theory approach***

Charmaz (2000) offers interesting insights into both the internal and external conflicts surrounding the use of positivist criteria within grounded theory. The different directions into which the founders of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) have moved in recent times, have added fuel to the debate surrounding grounded theory's purpose. Charmaz's (2000) analyses of Glaser's (1992) critique of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) proposed procedures for doing grounded theory in qualitative research, clearly indicates this schism. She points out with respect to this, that Glaser has come to occupy even more of a 'traditional positivism' stance, while Strauss and co-author Corbin, have tended to move in a post positivist direction in that they add the element of 'voice to their respondents'. In both these positions the element of positivism, buffered by the idea of an external, independent, objective reality that one can 'discover and record' from a distance (Charmaz 2000:513), continue to persist. Charmaz (2000) adds to these dominant views on grounded theory another position for validating qualitative research, namely, constructivist grounded theory, which she compares and contrasts with objectivist grounded theory. She argues that constructivist grounded theory acknowledges subjective constructions of multiple social realities by drawing on interpretive models of understanding, thereby occupying a position midway between positivism and postmodernism. The value of grounded theory methods in this instance lies in its ability to be applied in a flexible and enquiring manner without succumbing to a mechanical set of procedures that need to be satisfied before validity can be declared. Variations encountered in the data can therefore be accommodated to inform and even modify existing analyses. Grounded theory thus adds even more value and insight to interpretive methods of analysis (Charmaz 1995; 2000).

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<sup>16</sup> See Allen's (2010) critique of the grounded theory approaches adopted by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1998), Charmaz (2006), and Clarke (2005), for useful insight into the development of grounded theory.

In devising ways for using grounded theory more effectively, Charmaz (2000) advocates that it can be used with different data collection methods. She adds that gathering data with thick description is a way in which to overcome one of the shortcomings leveled against grounded theorists, namely that of 'slighting data collection'. Although much can be gained from Glaser's comparative approach to analysing data (for example, comparing data of the same individual; comparing different individuals and incidents), and Strauss and Corbin's questioning formats for collecting data, Charmaz (2000:514) does caution the tendency of most grounded theorists of presenting data as that which has 'an objective status'. She reminds us that data are narrative reconstructions of people's experiences and not the actual experience. Researchers interact, pose questions, and interrogate the data during the coding process.

Charmaz's (1995; 2000) notion of 'theoretical sampling' is an important concept within grounded theory approaches. Charmaz asserts that the process of structuring a well-developed grounded theory means that researchers need to return to the field after initial comparison of the data and identifying categories as completed. Initial coding allows researchers to identify 'gaps in our data and holes in our theories,' and going back into the field to conduct theoretical sampling allows us to 'sample specific issues only; we look for precise information to shed light on the emerging theory... to refine *ideas*' (Charmaz 2000:519).

The process of analysing data in a qualitative case study is therefore multi-layered. By paying attention to the content, the first level of analysis allows for, amongst other things, a specific chronological ordering of the data, allowing for a concrete descriptive narrative of the case under review. The developing of abstract categories to further describe and interpret the data adds another layer of interacting and making meaning out of the data. A third level of data analysis engages the researcher in the act of making inferences and developing theory from the data, a methodology earlier referred to as grounded theory, which comprises categories, properties and hypotheses. A three step coding process is employed in grounded theory, namely, line by line, open coding which is substantive in nature, selective coding, and theoretical coding (Jones and Alony 2011). Open coding generates themes, categories and sub-categories, which then guide the theoretical sampling process. This leads to selective coding, which

involves the saturation of core categories. Through theoretical coding the substantive codes are conceptualised in terms of how they relate to each other as theoretical propositions. Grounded theory is thus a specific method of analysis and entails constantly comparing data and categories that are generated. An important first step when studying the data is to pose questions related to identifying what is happening and what types of actions subjects are engaged in. Embedded in grounded theory is the element of flexibility so that data gathering and analysis can more easily be directed towards developing abstract understandings about the social phenomena being investigated (Charmaz 2005).

A brief illustration of the above can be seen in relation to the question of how the research participants developed an awareness of their racial identities in educational settings. The coding process showed, for example, that all the participants spoke about their schooling experiences in terms of their *sense of belonging*, which then emerged as quite a dominant theme in analysing the data. This *sense of belonging* was underlined by the properties of the school's physical location and the race, class, culture, and language profiles of the pupils and teachers, as well as the extent to which each research participant was able to identify with these. Information of this nature can be used to formulate particular hypotheses, for example: the sense of belonging experienced by Coloured pupils attending previously white schools is determined to a large extent by their class status. In fact the properties of race and class seems to converge to a large extent in the educational experiences of the three students presented here, and tended to reinforce stereotypical traits about Colouredness held by other groups. This impacted the extent to which each of the research participants challenged these stereotypes and the mechanisms they employed to present alternative representations of being 'other'. This movement towards developing theory grounded in the analysis of the data is what underlines the qualitative case study research process presented here.

### ***Criticisms of grounded theory approaches***

The main criticisms of grounded theory relates to the 'fracturing of the data' (Riessman 1990b cited in Charmaz 2000) into codes and categories, which 'lead to separating the experience from the experiencing subject, the meaning from the story, and the viewer from the viewed' (Charmaz 2000:521). Charmaz responds to these criticisms by asserting that constructivist grounded theory does take cognisance of subjective experiences of subjects within their lived realities, and the fact that meaning in

those social realities are constructed dialectically. This is detracting from an objectivist external reality, since the researcher is immersed in the data. He or she interacts with subjects in their realities, forms opinions and makes judgments. All of this contributes to the manner in which the researcher shapes and constructs a possible interpretation (from multiple possibilities) of the reality being observed (Charmaz 1995). This construction of reality is 'an image of *a* reality, not *the* reality' (Charmaz 2000:523). Data on its own does not provide meaning for a reality. Meaning only arises through an interactive and dynamic process between researcher and subject, which 'shapes' the researcher's perspective on what is being analysed. Constructivist grounded theory is always in process and 'open to refinement', offering 'explanation and understanding' of how a reality is constructed. What is constructed is not a 'generalizable truth', but 'a set of hypotheses and concepts' that can be used and applied elsewhere (Charmaz 2000:524).

Charmaz (1995; 2000) advocates that a sustained and meaningful relationship with subjects allows for a more honest and thoughtful relaying of experiences, making for richly textured data. In this sense, although objectivist grounded theory may also collect rich data, such theory is removed from the experiences, while the constructivist is not.

## **Considering computer-assisted coding software**

Charmaz's (2000) critique of computer-assisted software for coding data is quite informative with respect to developing strong grounded theory. Given the merits of computer-assisted software for coding, sorting, and managing large volumes of data,<sup>17</sup> Charmaz asserts that the extensive use and dependency on computer programmes 'may unintentionally foster an illusion that interpretive work can be reduced to a set of procedures' (2000:520) and 'a one-dimensional view of qualitative analysis' (2000:521). She also critiques the use of computers as a tool that has been used to legitimate research instead of actually carrying out the research. She views computer-assisted software as being more suited for objectivist grounded theory approaches, and less so for constructivist approaches which depend on 'nuanced interpretive analysis' (2000:520). Fossey et al. (2002) and Terre Blanche and Kelly

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<sup>17</sup> See Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) for an insightful overview of how computer software can be useful in interpretive research.



(1999) have similar reservations about the use of computers and how it may detract from the analytical procedures and authenticity of the interpersonal contexts associated with qualitative research.

In preparing myself for the coding process in this study, I attended a Sociology research methods course dealing with a specific computer-assisted software package. Although the course involved working through the process of coding and writing memoranda, the coding process was restricted to the actual computers in the classroom venue, which at that stage were the only machines on which computer-software for coding was loaded. The software programme had to be purchased by the respective individuals wanting to use it outside of the classroom, since the license agreement did not extend beyond the workshop format. Besides the unavailability of the software, I also felt that I needed to have much more practice using it given the volume of data I had collected. Before attending the course I had already set up quite a detailed manual coding structure, with which I was very familiar by this stage. Given the amount of work that I had already done with respect to the initial coding and analysis phases, I decided to stick with my own format for coding and analysing data. Although extremely time consuming, it gave me the opportunity to get to know and study my data in great detail, having manually set up each phase and level of coding. I was therefore able to stay close to the data throughout the collecting, coding and analysing phases.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### Identity Politics on the Cape Flats: Reflections on being Coloured

#### Introduction

Stake's (1995) 'Harper School' report offers interesting insights into the structuring and writing up of a case study. His descriptions in the report are quite elaborate, so as to allow readers important insights into the personalities of the staff and pupils, some of their idiosyncrasies, and how these impact the contexts in which events unfold. His use of vignettes in the report, 'to illustrate an aspect... an extreme representation' of a case (Stake 1995:130) is a useful strategy for highlighting core issues of enquiry and is one which I have used in describing each of my research participants in this section. In presenting these descriptions, I have used a narrative structure which is compatible in style across all three of my research cases, so as to facilitate cross-case findings (Stake 1995).

Presented here are the stories which the research participants have shared in their written reflections and conversations with me over a two year period. In turn, I am retelling these stories as selective biographical representations of their childhood and educational experiences of living in Coloured areas on the Cape Flats. Embedded within these narratives are their 'fateful moments'. At this stage, however, I have not explicitly identified what these 'fateful moments' are in the narratives. This is to allow readers the opportunity to develop their own feel and 'aha' moment (Angen 2000) for what transpires in these students' lives by simply connecting with their stories. Through these narrative extracts, which are mainly descriptive at this stage (although I acknowledge that the mere arrangement and construction of the data making up these descriptions already presuppose analytical and surface-like interpretive actions), I have attempted to show the profound impact that seemingly ordinary and everyday occurrences can have on individuals' senses of purpose, location and perception of the world. This often unpredictable nature of existence implies that we are constantly called upon to monitor our level of participation in a 'climate of risk' (Giddens 1991). The following narratives thus offer insights into the research participants' own reflections on risk situations in their lives. The aim in this thesis is to unpack what is deemed to be the more significant of these risk situations in order to show how these have profoundly affected

the manner in which these Coloured students have gone about organising and claiming their own space in the world. The reflections presented here therefore act as a precursor to the more in-depth interpretive analysis of the actual ‘fateful moment’ episodes that will follow. Each biographical narrative is presented separately so as to keep the identities and the voices of the research participants distinct. For simplicity of flow in these sections, other than the extended quotes, I indicate the actual words the particular research participant has spoken through use of single quotation marks, without reference to their name each time.

### **Margaret’s story: A case of wanting to be Black and letting your hair down**

Margaret grew up in the suburb of Grassy Park, a predominantly Coloured neighbourhood located on the Cape Flats. In terms of racial classification she and her family are designated as Coloured, although this is not how she views herself, since she regards ‘Coloured’ identity as a product of the injustices perpetrated by the apartheid regime. Margaret attended Coloured schools in the Grassy Park area, and as such, her schooling experiences did not create much opportunity for interacting with other race groups (Black and White) on any meaningful level. Although she is fully bilingual, she refers to her home language as ‘kombuis Afrikaans’ (literally translated as ‘Kitchen Afrikaans’; a type of Afrikaans that is spoken informally, with a mixture of English in-between). She undertook all of her schooling in Afrikaans, and has often had to defend this choice as one that did not negatively impact her schooling experiences and academic results. She is the youngest of three children, and grew up in an environment where academic achievement was an important feature. Margaret’s older sister is a physicist, her brother is an accountant, and her father a biology lecturer at a teacher’s training college, an institution that was designated, under apartheid, for the training of Coloured trainee teachers only.<sup>1</sup> Margaret’s mother is a ‘stay-home mother’, and was not able to complete her schooling. Margaret claims that she grew up in a space that prepared her to cope in the outside world, and to develop focus and direction. She said that her parents ‘knew that they were going to provide the right environment at home... irrespective of which school [I went] to’.

She claimed that her home environment made her realise that her family was different from other Coloured families, since those other families had a tendency to exemplify their self-worth through the accumulation of material possessions, often at the expense of gaining a good education.

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<sup>1</sup> The apartheid regime established separate education departments based on racial classification. This was to ensure that funding and resources were allocated disproportionately to the various departments, so as to ensure White privilege. Fiske and Ladd (2005) offer useful insights into the disparities between the different education departments under the apartheid government, and the ways in which this affected people’s life chances.

Margaret's view was that a different outlook and value system was adopted in her home, a space in which she was given the option to develop certain interests and exercise certain choices. This could be seen in her interest in alternative rock music and her choice of taking art as a school subject; something at which she excelled. Extended family and friends viewed these pursuits as being strange for a Coloured girl,<sup>2</sup> and Margaret explained that she has had to defend her interests since the age of eleven. Her status as a self-confessed atheist (despite her mother being an active church member) made her realise the extent to which her family could be considered to be a 'non-traditional' Coloured family, since the element of personal choice was an important and respected feature in her household.

The nature of her parents' relationship with each other has done much to shape her approach to academia and her attitude towards fostering personal relationships. Margaret's mother in particular, occupies a very important space in her life. Her mother, is the only family member who had not managed to obtain a grade 12 (matric) school leaving certificate.<sup>3</sup> Her mother's lack of academic achievement has made Margaret feel exceedingly protective towards her. She feels partly responsible for her mother's non-academic status, and attributes the entire family's academic achievements to her mother's sacrifices. Margaret regards the educational disparity between her parents as a source of tension in their relationship, and considers her mother's situation as a warning to make the correct decision when it comes to choosing a career, a life-partner and marriage. She takes seriously her mother's sentiments about the importance of not being trapped in traditional gender roles, and to put her own needs first.

Margaret relates that she set her sights on obtaining a Doctoral degree the moment she realised what it was. This teenage ambition is fuelled by her father's Master of Science (M.Sc.) degree, and is encapsulated in her utterance of, 'The PhD drives me. I want that damn thing!' Another motivating factor in her life is her 'fear of mediocrity and the fear of being like just another number... taking up space'. At the age of five, she claims she was already an avid viewer of nature documentaries, an interest that was supported by her parents.

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<sup>2</sup> In traditional Coloured communities, the majority of Coloured schools under apartheid had very little to offer in terms of catering for students' interests outside of the set curriculum, which meant that enrichment programmes were largely absent in these settings. White schools on the other hand were very well resourced, and could accommodate a wide range of extra-curricular activities. See Fiske and Ladd (2005) for an overview of how resources were allocated to Black and White schools. Also see Samson's (2007) description of the stereotypes associated with Coloureds on the Cape Flats.

<sup>3</sup> van der Berg (2007) shows that Black South Africans born around 1950 would on average have had about 6 fewer years of education than their White counterparts. I estimate that Margaret's mother would have been born close to this period.

Margaret also developed her political awareness at a very early age. She grew up in a home environment where black-consciousness<sup>4</sup> was stressed, particularly by her father, through his active engagement in the liberation struggle (he has authored various local publications dealing with the socio-political context of struggle in South Africa). Her awareness of the black consciousness movement developed into something with which she strongly came to identify. She regards her black consciousness upbringing and her public schooling experiences as something that has shaped and moulded her identity. She sees herself as fortunate for *not* having attended a former Model C school<sup>5</sup> (a school which is regarded as privileged, being historically white), in that it would have made her less critical and less socially aware. Her black consciousness upbringing has therefore profoundly impacted her sense of viewing the world: 'I think it cemented my character and my identity's strong, I'm entrenched in it'. This environment moulded her ideas about issues of identity in a very particular way from an early age and formed the basis of Margaret's early dissociation from the label of 'Coloured', which she regards as an oppressive label that was imposed upon her. Like her tastes in music and art, she also had to 'defend' her choice of not recognising this label. This oppressive identity marker inhibited and restricted the way in which she would have liked to represent herself; something she was eager to rectify when she entered the more cosmopolitan and enlightened (UCT) university environment.

Her acceptance into UCT to do a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in Molecular and Cell Biology (MCB) offered her the opportunity to assert her chosen identity. She came to the university with the view that her black consciousness outlook would allow her to be accepted as 'Black' by the UCT community. Her stance was 'I am Black, within the South African context I am Black'. She defines her understanding of 'Black' in the sense that:

If most of your ancestors were oppressed, marginalised, enslaved and if you look at that person and you can see that – ... that's 'Black'... if you were colonised, if you look like that majority of your ancestors – the colonised, not the colonisers ... then you're 'Black'.

(Margaret MMUF interview)

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<sup>4</sup> Black consciousness was made popular in South Africa by the anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko in the late 1960's. During apartheid the black consciousness movement actively aimed to promote Black pride and self-respect amongst disenfranchised South African communities, and the term 'Black' was used inclusively to include Africans, Coloureds and Indians. Black consciousness became popular amongst Coloureds, especially the educated elite who were involved in the liberation struggle, in the late 1970's. See Adhikari (2005; 2009) for more insight into this.

<sup>5</sup> Former Model C (White) schools are the upmarket government schools. These schools are administrated and largely funded by a governing body of parents and alumni, and fees are somewhere between private and regular government school fees. Private schools receive no government funding, and operate on the basis of fees charged. The tail end of apartheid saw the White schools deciding on one of three models: Model A became private with no state subsidy; Model B retained the status quo with a reduction of state subsidy to 70%, and Model C schools would receive state funding only for its staff and could determine its own admission policies. See Hofmeyr (2000) for an in-depth analysis of how the South African school structure changed in the transition to democracy.

With respect to this assessment she held the opinion that 'all marginalised people have that sort of familiarity. ... So... if you're not 'White', if you don't look European... you're 'Black''. Her desire to be recognised as 'Black' within the walls of academia was however not forthcoming. Upon entering university she quickly realised that her imposed Coloured identity status marked her as 'other'. This 'revelation' manifested itself within Margaret as 'a root of lots of resentment and disillusionment'. Her rejection by the Black UCT community was quite a shock, especially since she was expecting such rejection to come from the White campus community, which she felt she was more prepared for, since she 'had a defense mechanism for that'. The unexpected reaction from the Black African sector meant that they, like others, had 'superimposed' the label of Coloured onto her, without any input from her on the matter, which is not something she took lightly. Her reaction to this imposition is scathing:

I think people should be more sensitive towards that because I'm not going to call the 'Black' person 'Bantu' or 'Kaffir'.<sup>6</sup> And I think that that's the exact... same thing – if somebody calls me 'Coloured' it's analogous to me calling a 'Black' 'Kaffir' or calling an American person 'Nigger'.  
(Margaret MMUF interview)

To make matters worse, the label of 'Coloured' imposed on her by Black African students, was not one that was automatically accepted by other Coloureds' with whom she had been categorised, since they, too, questioned and challenged her status, since she did not *look* Coloured.<sup>7</sup>

With all of this baggage in hand Margaret applied for the MMUF scholarship. Her initial entry into the programme left her feeling insecure and unworthy of the nomination, but she soon discovered a safe space where she could debate sensitive race and identity issues amongst like-minded peers. She developed bonding relationships with many of her UCT MMUF peers, and began to feel comfortable with who she was. These experiences within MMUF added a new dimension to the way in which she viewed herself. Prior to MMUF, there were only two Margaret's: 'Home Margaret' and 'MCB Margaret'. 'Home Margaret' was a passive participant in Margaret's life, and simply went through the motions of the day by combining personal interests and academic interests. 'Home Margaret' was by no means viewed as an active and vibrant component of Margaret's life: 'Home Margaret doesn't do anything, she studies and listens to music and watches TV. She's just kind of there'. 'MCB Margaret' is very much a disciplinary identity constructed within the context of specific

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'kaffir' is a derogatory term used to refer to Black Africans in South Africa, so as to emphasise their inferior status.

<sup>7</sup> In South Africa, Coloureds are stereotypically characterised by a combination of skin colour, hair texture, language and accent, especially in the Western Cape. However, in reality Coloureds in South Africa represent a range of skin tones and hair textures, and could easily also be labelled either White or Black. Markers that do not fit these categories tend to raise some suspicion. See Adhikari (2005) for more on the markers of Coloured identity.

MCB relationships that Margaret has no choice but to be a part of, so as to get through the degree. This identity is therefore a necessity in which her choices of association are limited by the degree. Since the degree involves reluctant compliance at times, 'MCB Margaret' has allowed herself to develop certain defence mechanisms 'just so that I can get through the day without screaming'. The MMUF scholarship provided her with another identity; namely, 'MMUF Margaret', which is spoken of very differently. 'MMUF Margaret' is invested in maintaining relationships with other MMUF fellows, out of choice. She values the type of interaction they have as a cohort. Margaret has a sense of freedom of expression and being comfortable and happy with whom she is when she is 'MMUF Margaret', something that she is unable to experience in any of the other aspects of her identity.

Margaret's trip to America, as part of the UCT-MMUF cohort to attend the MMUF Summer Institute, turned out to be another highlight in her life. Before going to the USA, she had merely considered the teaching aspect of being a PhD student as part of the 'turf'. However, it was the teaching and learning experience at the Summer Institute that made her realise for the very first time, 'how important the teaching aspects are for being a PhD'. The USA experience made her 'less selfish' and made her think more earnestly about the ways in which she could impact other people's lives.

Socially, the USA Summer Institute experience also created a space where she was able to let her guard down and be herself, secure in the knowledge that her actions would not attract negative attention:

It was like – I wore my hair down, I never did that! There's so many people with gaps in their teeth there... every second person had like a bigger gap than I did.<sup>8</sup> And there's no such thing as crisp hair... so I let my hair down. If this was Cape Town I would have so not have done that... Because it just – it attracts attention that you don't want... I felt liberated. I could do whatever I wanted... For once I wasn't Coloured with a 'u'. (Margaret MMUF interview)

Margaret's claiming of her Coloured status without the 'u' is important, in that it signals her ownership of a specific type of Coloured identity that does not conform to the traditional restrictions imposed on such an identity in the Western Cape.

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<sup>8</sup> Amongst some of the working class Coloured youth a trend of removing the front teeth became very popular during the 1980's and early 1990's. This came to be known as 'the passion gap' and was associated with the act of kissing and other sexual myths. See for example, the articles by Blandy (2009) and Huisman (2013) for information about this. Although Margaret did not have her front teeth extracted, she does have a big gap between her front teeth, and feels conscious about this.

## Glenn's story: A case of being proud, Coloured, and coming to terms with being Black

Glenn grew up in Kensington, another Coloured suburb on the Cape Flats. He describes himself as a 'laat lammetjie', which signals that he was the youngest, born a number of years after his two siblings. At the age of eight, his parents divorced, and Glen and his mother moved to the predominantly Coloured township of Atlantis, also on the Cape Flats, where he attended the local primary school for three years. He claims that these years were amongst the most enjoyable of his childhood. He had a close circle of friends, was top of his class, and was quite comfortable with who he was. At the age of eleven, Glenn and his mother moved back to Kensington, since it was becoming increasingly difficult for her to commute to work in the city. She later purchased a house in the area, which has been the family home ever since.

The two people who had the greatest impact on Glenn's life are his grandmother and his mother, both of whom he speaks very highly. It was his grandmother; a disciplinarian with a passion for teaching music, who taught Glenn to play the piano. Because of his grandmother's influence, he regards his life as being 'framed by music', and to this day, claims to gain inspiration from her. Glenn explained that his mother was unable to complete her own schooling since she was forced to work to support her family. He admires the fact that she persevered, and not only completed Grade 12 when he was a young boy, but also went on to complete an array of courses towards improving her qualification as a nurse. This love and thirst for education is a driving force behind Glenn's own passion for learning.

Glenn grew up romanticising the notion of 'Whiteness'. During his foundation phase (grades one to three) at primary school, he admired the White characters in the prescribed English Readers. He regarded them as idealised versions of White South Africans, in that they were neatly dressed, privileged, lived in nice homes and always seemed to be having fun. This idealisation made him aware of his own difference as a classified Coloured individual, and made him resent being part of a 'Coloured' family, since this meant being vulnerable to economic hardships. Fortunately, Glenn's mother was able to provide a stable and relatively comfortable home environment. This relative sense of comfort made him extremely anxious about visiting poorer family members as a child, and he actively sought to distance himself from these types of family interactions. For Glenn, being a poor Coloured also had ramifications for the way in which, 'you conducted yourself in public and the manner in which others viewed you'. As such, he prides himself on the fact that he does not act



as 'poor' Coloureds, and abhors 'common' Coloured behaviour, such as drinking out of paper cups. He also chooses not to associate himself with popular Coloured stereotypes:

I do not want to be boxed into that stereotype because I don't see myself as that. Yes, some of my family members may fall into that stereotype but I don't view myself... I could never see myself be associated with flower sellers and fishermen and factory workers.' My dad's been a factory worker, he's running [laughter in voice] 40 years work service – and he loves it, he wouldn't change it for the world. He says that he's not interested he didn't pursue a matric when he had the opportunity because he's so happy with what he does. If that works for him, great! I don't understand it. (Glenn MMUF interview)

Glenn's grappling with being Coloured became an issue when he started his high school career at Pinelands High – a previously White (Model C) school. Glenn immediately felt 'different' and 'inferior' to the other pupils, the majority of whom were White. He began to feel all of the weight he previously associated with being 'poor' and 'Coloured' press down on his shoulders. Even though he distanced himself from the stereotypical poor and struggling Coloured figures mentioned above, he *was* at the bottom end of the socio-economic scale at this particular high school. His difference was intensified by not being able to partake in his White peers' ritual display of badges they collected when they were at primary school. These badges, which symbolised various achievements, were attached to school blazers for all to see. Glenn could not even afford a blazer, and unlike his White peers, had to travel home by taxi<sup>9</sup> – a taxi for the Coloured pupils – which further signalled him out as someone who did not belong.

Overall, Glenn's high school experiences were a cause of great discomfort to him and not something on which he likes to reflect. At his first high school, Kensington High, a predominantly Coloured school, he was teased by the boys for playing the piano, and not soccer and rugby. He sought refuge from this type of teasing, and went to Pinelands High, where he studied music. However, he found that he was met with the same degree of animosity from both White and Black pupils. This took Glenn by surprise because Pinelands High specialised in music instruction, and as such, he expected pupils' attitudes to be different. But the school also placed much emphasis on sport, especially rugby,<sup>10</sup> and those boys who did not participate were teased. This, coupled with his perceived low economic status as a Coloured pupil in a now predominantly White schooling environment, fuelled his isolation and resentment. His only recourse was to commit fully to his music lessons, and to do

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<sup>9</sup> This is a mini bus, a popular mode of public transport used predominantly by working class commuters.

<sup>10</sup> Rugby was promoted as the main sport at White schools during apartheid. It was the national sport and a symbol of White (especially Afrikaner) pride. Rugby continues to be promoted at previously Model C schools.

really well so as to prove his worth and legitimate his position at the school. He was a recipient of an award for the best music student in his final year of high school.

Glenn was fully intent on not repeating his schooling experience when he came to university. He regarded himself as different to many of the other music students, since he chose to focus on the theoretical components of his music degree, instead of the practical components. As an undergraduate, he felt that he did not quite fit the mould in the music faculty, despite doing exceptionally well. His first encounters with faculty in the music department were cautious and apprehensive. He continuously grappled with the impressions that he thought were created by his racial status in the minds of his lecturers; 'And I constantly thought about how are these 'White' professors thinking about me as a little Black boy, you know; you know what I mean?'

He claims that his experiences of alienation and isolation at Pinelands High and of occupying a passive and fearful role in the classroom did however, make him more determined to act confidently at university. He became assertive and vocal in his university classes, took up a more proactive stance and networked more. Glenn wanted to prove to himself and others that he was 'not going to be scared', and was intent on ensuring that 'varsity years was mine for the taking'. Upon reflection, he regards these as the best years of his life.

His own academic progress as a Coloured music student made him extremely aware of the academic under-performance amongst his Black peers; a state of affairs which actually confirmed and justified his initial misgivings about equity issues. It was only later when he was appointed as a tutor that he realised the extent of the problems faced by many of the Black music students. It dawned on him then that the admissions policy in the music school unfairly placed Black students from poor schooling backgrounds, at a distinct disadvantage within a university context such as UCT. At this stage Glenn dealt with Black disadvantage purely as an external, academic problem.

Upon being selected as a MMUF fellow in his third year of study, Glenn was again confronted with issues of equity and transformation within the higher education setting. As a new MMUF fellow he found himself becoming increasingly irritated by the MMUF motto of *transforming the academy*. He was forced to confront his understanding of what it meant to be a Coloured South African when he attended the Summer Institute at Emory University in Atlanta along with four other UCT students and about thirty-five American students. He entered into a debate with a fellow Coloured UCT MUFF student, who had a very different opinion on what the term 'Coloured' meant. Glenn blatantly refused to identify as anything but Coloured, while the other MMUF student viewed

himself as 'Black'. Glenn's take on Black identity was that it had very strong tribal ties, which made it more authentic: 'For me 'Black' meant authentic 'Black', tribal 'Black', 'Black' which is not being diluted, if you can say that.'

In validating this stance Glenn claimed to have more European ancestry than African. He grew up in a home environment that affirmed a fair skin tone — such as his and his mother's — and a European culture. The home space was where his African heritage was not really spoken of, and when it was acknowledged it was viewed as 'brown' not as African. He views Cape Town's 'Langarm' (Afrikaans term for ballroom dancing) Dance Bands,<sup>11</sup> as unique features of Coloured identity. Given this setting, Glenn viewed Coloured identity as something that was initially imposed on people, and which created much resentment. At a later stage, however, Glenn recalled that the label of 'Coloured' became reformulated into something positive, which led to many, including Glenn's family, claiming to be 'proudly Coloured'.<sup>12</sup> This allowed Glenn to adopt and embrace his Coloured status as that which was distinguishable from being classified as White and Black. His MMUF Summer Institute experiences in Atlanta also gave him much to think about in terms of the relationship between racial identity and the nature of academic success, especially when he was confronted with the African American MMUF students, all of whom were top academic achievers.

After returning to South Africa, Glenn and his UCT MMUF fellows began to unpack and process the Summer Institute experience in more detail, and upon reflection, the Summer Institute experience in Atlanta began to take on a much deeper meaning for him. It impacted on his role as a tutor in the music department and provided him with a particular lens for analysing his initial misgivings about Black academic under-performance. His Summer Institute experience in Atlanta began to connect many of the dots about the transformational aims of the MMUF programme. The latter was epitomised by the visit to the Atlanta Summer Institute by the MMUF programme director, Dr Lydia English, whose interaction with the MMUF fellows had quite a profound effect on him (I will say more about this in the analysis section). As he began to process his Summer Institute experiences in more depth, he began to view his own music department at UCT more critically with respect to issues of redress and transformation. A few months later, Glenn was selected as a graduate assistant for the MMUF Coordinators Conference that was held in Cape Town. He was able to attend quite a few of the presentations and panel discussions at the conference, and was flabbergasted by the depth and level of academic engagement around issues of race, access,

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<sup>11</sup> 'Langarm' dance bands were also the focus of his Honours thesis.

<sup>12</sup> See Erasmus and Pieterse (1999) for some background into the historical developments and locations of Coloured identity in the Western Cape and for some insights into 'Brown Nationalist movements' (p. 175).

redress, transformation and equity. It was at this conference that all the bits and pieces of the MMUF experiences began to come together for Glenn, and he finally grasped the essence of what the MMUF programme was trying to achieve. He solidified his commitment to the programme at this stage, and took up the transformational issue in all earnest in his own teaching and interactions within the university setting. He actively put himself forward as a role model for Black students, and became willing to share his own experiences with them. His outlook with respect to issues of Coloured versus Black changed fundamentally, and the prospect of becoming a 'Black professor' was now something he aspired to.

### **Issachar's story: A case of Coloured middle class 'schizophrenia'**

Issachar also grew up in the Coloured suburb of Kensington on the Cape Flats. Financially, Issachar's family was slightly better off than many of his friends' families in the neighbourhood. He states that his parents worked hard to shield him from the harshness of working class life, by socialising him 'into a middle class mentality with a working class budget'. This made him feel guilty about enjoying some of the privileges he had access to, knowing that his friends could not do the same. Every year when his family went on a camping trip, he hid in his father's 'bakkie' (van) as they drove past his friends, since he felt 'hideous' about leaving them behind. Growing up in this manner made him feel 'schizophrenic' throughout his schooling career.

Issachar first attended the local Coloured school in his home neighbourhood. His parents later transferred him to Pinelands Primary, located in a historically White area, where he completed his last two years of primary schooling. The thinking behind the transfer was that it would enable him to gain access to Pinelands High School. Both these Pinelands schools were former Model C schools, and meant that his parents had to allocate quite a bit extra from the household budget to cover the steep increase in fees. Upon reflection Issachar states that the Pinelands Primary schooling environment made him feel extremely 'schizophrenic' since he had to adopt the 'model accent' of the school while trying to grapple with where to locate his 'other' outside identity. At this early age he was under the impression that he could only have one genuine identity. Later he realised that part of adapting to new environments meant that one could actually utilise different aspects of one's identity to suit different contexts. This was quite liberating for Issachar, since he felt he could now play around with his identity a bit more. At Pinelands Primary he recalled how all of the 'gam ouens' (Afrikaans slang term for Coloured working class pupils in particular) immediately bonded as a defence mechanism against the White majority. Any condescending comments made by White

pupils towards Coloured pupils at Pinelands Primary were dealt with in a physical manner, with Coloured pupils resorting to 'klapping' (hitting with a flat hand) the transgressors. This type of aggression came as quite a 'cultural shock' to Issachar and it allowed Coloured groupings to gain a certain amount of control over their 'softer' White peers.

This trend of retaliation from Coloured pupils was carried through into Pinelands High School, where they received refuge and support from the senior Coloured pupils, who were amongst the first pupils of colour at the school. This support was needed, since rugby,<sup>13</sup> as the sport of choice at the school, often attracted 'big *boere*'<sup>14</sup> [who] really stamped their authority around the 'young laaities'.<sup>15</sup> During the Afrikaans lessons, Coloured pupils were often rebuked for not speaking proper accentuated Afrikaans. Issachar's relationship with the Afrikaans language stemmed from his mother's rejection of using Afrikaans in the home, since she had been forced to speak Afrikaans as a child.<sup>16</sup> Issachar's uncles on the other hand, only spoke Afrikaans to him, and he developed a certain fondness for the language. So he felt 'alienated' by the lack of Afrikaans in his home and strived to make the language a part of how he viewed and identified himself, which was with the Coloured working class. For Issachar, practicing how to speak Afrikaans with a very specific Coloured working class accent was an important part of 'learning how to sound authentic'. Language usage therefore became an important marker of the identity he strove to embody at high school.

Another aspect of being authentic in the Coloured high schooling sense meant not wearing short pants as part of the school uniform. Only long pants were traditionally worn at Coloured high schools on the Cape Flats, something Issachar is very aware of. Short pants were, however, part of the official school uniform at most former Model C schools, including Pinelands High, much to the dismay of Issachar and his clique of friends. Wearing shorts as part of your school uniform 'immediately [made] you look like a toss when you come into Kensington'. Issachar and his friends made enough fuss about this issue at school and were eventually granted permission to only wear long pants.

After matriculating, Issachar registered and completed a National Diploma in Graphic Design. He was recruited by *The Jupiter Drawing Room*, a local advertising agency in Cape Town, immediately thereafter, where he worked for a short while. All through this period he had also been honing his

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<sup>13</sup> School Rugby is traditionally the sport of choice for Whites, while soccer is traditionally regarded as a Black sport.

<sup>14</sup> The term 'boere' is an Afrikaans word for 'Whites' (traditionally associated with Afrikaners).

<sup>15</sup> A term referring to young children.

<sup>16</sup> Afrikaans and English (but not African languages) were part of the official school curriculum in Coloured schools under apartheid. Both these languages formed part of the official subject assessments, and both had to be passed before pupils could progress to the next grade. Many Coloured households spoke Afrikaans as a first language.

skills as a hip-hop lyricist and spoken word artist (English and Afrikaans). These skills led to his involvement with a community based radio station, Bush Radio, where he developed, co-coordinated and facilitated a series of educational and youth day workshops. His attraction to the field of media and the performing arts signalled a tension between his work at the advertising agency and his passion for community orientated initiatives. He joined *Alkemy* (Alternative Kericulum Mentoring Youth) in 2002, which is aimed at developing critical youth leadership and political awareness through a hip-hop genre. His skill as a spoken word artist also took off, and he was invited to perform at events such as the *Cape Town One City Festival*, the *District Six Museum*, and even internationally. In 2005 he facilitated a year-long lyric writing workshop for young men in prison, so as to help prisoners express themselves through music. Much of the inspiration for undertaking projects of this nature came from the mentoring system that was in place at *Alkemy*, which included facilitation by the likes of John and Jean Commaroff (both local distinguished Anthropologists) and Professor Mohamed Adikhari (a UCT Historian whose work I draw on in this thesis). The educational philosophy provided by *Alkemy*, convinced Issachar to leave the advertising field and to embark on pursuing a university education.

By the time that Issachar joined *Alkemy*, he had been struggling for some time, with his identity as a Rastafarian. Although he had worn his dreadlocks for about five years, on reflection, he had never been able to feel completely comfortable with being a Rastafarian. He felt like an outsider, constantly questioning his sense of belonging. His Rastafarian status gave him a sense of feeling 'self-righteousness', which adversely affected his relationships with his family. His introduction to Islam during his time at *Alkemy* further intensified his doubts about being an authentic Rastafarian. The *Alkemy* mentoring workshops provided a platform for confronting these issues. During one such session, his mentor, whom he regarded as 'a spiritual counselor' informed him that his dreadlocks were standing in the way of his progress. Although his father had told him the same thing numerous times, Issachar trusted his mentor's judgment, and for the first time in about five years he seriously contemplated cutting his hair (and actually did so). The *Alkemy* mentoring structure was something which Issachar felt he really needed in his life at the time, as it compensated for the lack of support he felt he was getting from his parents. He explained that he was hoping that the guidance he was receiving from his mentors would allow him to one day respond in the appropriate parental manner to questions posed by children, instead of the 'hey, hey, I'm watching TV now' responses that he was used to. Issachar regarded the *Alkemy* mentors as role models, and their interest in him allowed him to 'invest' in himself. The support provided by this structure gave him the courage he needed to cut his dreadlocks. After that act, he 'felt liberated'. At the same time he also

experienced a new sense of powerlessness and vulnerability without his dreadlocks, since it was his Rastafarian status that afforded him a sense of safety and security in the world. Being treated differently for the first time in five years made him feel like he ‘fell down to earth’. The dreadlocks had afforded him a particular type of external strength and physical presence, and he worked hard at rebuilding and testing that kind of strength and confidence on the inside. He felt a strong need to grow this type of inner strength because of who he was, and not who others thought he was or wanted him to be.

Shortly after cutting his hair, Issachar registered at UCT for a triple major in Anthropology, Linguistics and History (so as to accommodate all his interests). The experiences he gained through the *Alkemy* workshops and his growing awareness about Islam enabled him to navigate the university space without having to depend on his external identity markers. Issachar’s entry into university life was purpose driven. He claims that University, like his entry into Pinelands Primary and Pinelands High, meant that he had to find a space to call his own. The political consciousness and social awareness that he had developed through his experiences at *Alkemy*, prompted him to assert and to play around with external identity markers in a very particular way. One way in which he did this was to resort to using Afrikaans slang in his classes as his medium of intellectual engagement. This was a political statement on his part, so as to make the voice of the absent working class present in the university curriculum, and to assert that he was different from his peers who did not take working class issues seriously. Again, he felt himself traversing two worlds; that of the working class struggle and the elite world of university education. He felt that he could only be passionate about his intellectual pursuits if it involved elements of social activism.

As a result, he distanced himself from the sense of apathy he experienced amongst other Coloured students at UCT. He described these students as ‘middle class and removed from political responsibility’. He was very aware of his own privileged position within UCT in relation to the extreme poverty and lack of opportunity experienced by those on the outside. Such awareness made him identify strongly with working class issues because of the important role these issues played in his life. This polarity between the haves and have nots grounded his sense of mission within academia.

His entry into the MMUF space is therefore one marked by contradiction. MMUF could provide him with additional academic resources and mentoring support and open up opportunities that would allow him the necessary platform to operate and network more effectively in an academic setting. On the other hand, he viewed the MMUF space as exclusively elitist and removed from the



concerns of Black working class society. Academia and MMUF in particular, therefore presented a particular challenge for him in that he wanted to be an intellectual and also a part of those whom academia marginalised. Within the MMUF fold, he set about balancing his intellectual growth with a strong element of social change. For him being critically and intellectually engaged was not enough; there had to be an element of social change that came to the fore as a result of such critical engagement. This is what he set out to pursue within MMUF.

Issachar constructed his identity in terms of concentric circles, and describes the outside circle representing God, moving inwards towards being human, African, Black and Coloured in the centre. He is able to identify as African through his encounters with the Nation of Islam and also through developing a political consciousness about 'Africanness' through the unity he experienced being a part of the hip-hop community. His Coloured identity meant that he was able to speak in a certain way and identify with a group of people with very specific cultural signifiers, and this made him feel secure. On the other hand he also hated the label of 'Coloured' since he believed 'there was no self-determination in the creation' of this label, since it was imposed by an oppressive regime. For Issachar, there exists a tension between those that were labelled as 'Coloured', and those who label themselves as such. For him, it felt like 'there's a schism, like schizophrenia' since no decisive conclusion can be drawn from the debate about whether to use or discard the Coloured label, since this would mean 'being without a name', which is the source of the dilemma. Issachar used hip-hop to address the issue of misrepresentations of Coloured identity. At the same time, his discomfort with labelling himself as Black stemmed from 'the feeling... of shame that you weren't oppressed enough... oppressed to the degree of 'Blackness' that makes you comfortabl[e]... to say... you are Black and you have a shared experience'.

Issachar sought refuge from some of this confusion and feelings of schizophrenia by investing in his spiritual quest. His religious affiliations see him moving from being an Christian, then a Rastafarian, and then a follower of Islam. Islam helped him to understand the purpose and 'the beauty in all' of these religious traditions. He used this understanding of religion in his quest to strive for 'constant perfection of the soul... purifying... just washing out the shit and allowing that essence to be the one that makes the decisions for you'. In the process of rebuilding an awareness of himself and his location in the world, he also began to mend the broken bridges between himself and his family. He now felt able to acknowledge the extent of his parents' investment in his well-being, and the sacrifices they made to sustain that investment.



## Conclusion

The stories related here reveal some of the struggles of ordinary Coloured South African university students who grapple with diversity and adversity in its many forms and guises. The issues they raise about social and economic displacement, unequal representation, feelings of isolation, loss and guilt, are symptomatic of the historical hardships that many previously disadvantaged people in SA are facing today. These stories are also significant in that they traverse that grey area of what it means to be Coloured in SA. The narratives represented here show how a group of students, who all share the same Coloured racial classification, have either embraced or rejected their Coloured status, kept their Coloured status in addition to identifying as Black, or have held onto their Coloured status under duress, owing to the lack of alternatives. These stories reveal how the impacts of displacement and the imposition of labels such as 'Coloured', have been developed in relation to hegemonic discourses around what it means to be Black. Being caught between these hegemonic discourses has left these students with the responsibility of redefining and articulating their own identity. In doing so, they face the risk of being rejected or accepted, not only by the prevailing racial hegemonies, but also by those with whom they share a minority status. From this vantage point, these stories present us with the unique opportunity to develop deeper understandings of the constructions of Coloured identity as we celebrate our second decade of democracy. Paying attention to the significant and life-changing moments within these biographical narratives allows for the illumination of the complexities of being Coloured. At a more conceptual and theoretical level, these 'fateful moment' episodes signify the degree of resilience and adaptability inherent in the identity construction process that keeps these Coloured students both grounded and moving forward.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### **Fateful Moment Encounters: Identity transformations that create a new sense of self awareness, purpose and mission in life**

The previous section offered a glimpse into the lives of the student participants that inform this thesis. Their narratives have been constructed with a particular purpose in mind: to locate each of them in their normal everyday contexts. These are the contexts in which they shape and construct a meaningful existence, and in which they encounter and grapple with other possibilities of selfhood. Through the construction of these case study narratives I have attempted to trace some type of progression in the lives of the research participants, with respect to how each of them have developed their initial sense of location and belonging in the world. In doing this I have attempted to provide an important glimpse into the value systems that each of them have adopted, and how such value systems have informed the ways in which they view and relate to the world. The logical progressions of these narratives have provided us with an overview of their life histories, and a feel for some of the routine activities and interactions that have formed part of their everyday experiences. This type of broad overview allows some insight into a few of the significant influences that have contributed to these students' identity construction processes.

In the next three chapters I focus specifically on what I have identified as 'fateful moments' in each of these students' lives. These 'fateful moments' arise out of the broader case study narratives presented previously, thus offering us a contextually grounded framework for unpacking these moments. I show what comprises these 'fateful moments' and the extent to which these moments result in radical transformations of self-identity. I point out the extent to which these transformations completely re-orientate and reposition each of my research participants in their interactions with the world. While the 'fateful moment' episode remains the specific focus of enquiry here, I show how such a moment is not an isolated event, but forms part and parcel of an interrelated network of everyday events which bring individuals to a crossroad in their lives. The challenges and choices they are confronted with at this stage become the defining moments underlining and informing their new emerging sense of self.

## Issachar's story: In search of the real me – coming to terms with schizophrenia, dreadlocks and being authentic

Issachar's search for meaning and a sense of belonging in the world forms part of a long and difficult journey of self-discovery. His linguistic, class, racial and religious affiliations create dichotomies in his life which fragment his sense of self and leave him disconnected from the contexts he inhabits. In what follows I attempt to show how Issachar's fateful moment comes to form a pivotal episode in his life, which allows him to redress and redefine his fragmented past in quite a substantial way. His search for meaning and wholeness in life takes on a particular religious orientation which frames much of his experiences in the world. I draw on this element of religiosity to elaborate on the nature of Issachar's 'fateful moment' and the extent to which it structures and impacts his actions in the pursuit of a sense of belonging and authenticity in his life. The work of Travisano (1970) in this area has been particularly helpful for framing and deconstructing the religious and spiritual dimensions of the 'fateful moment' episode unpacked here.

A 'fateful moment' in the life of Issachar:

I never thought about it that day; I wasn't going to do it, nobody knew I was going to do it. I was partying with my girlfriend – she *smaaked* [fancied] the dreads and me being like mad. I said I have to tell somebody. He said – no, like you don't have to tell anybody, let's go do it. So we did it and it was just like I felt liberated. But at the same time, the very same day I was taking a taxi home and some *bra wys* me, 'Hello *jy*, *wie's jy?*' [a stranger confronted me and demanded to know who I was] And it was just like... I fell down to earth.

(Issachar Interview 2007)

Issachar's 'fateful moment', captured in the extract above, represents a culmination of numerous identity conflicts and confrontational encounters with his father. The nature of these encounters concerned the manner in which his dreadlocks were hampering his development and shielding him from revealing aspects of himself that were sincere, real, vulnerable and open to dialogue and change. Embedded in Issachar's identity crises is his sense of self-doubt and alienation and the fact that he felt like an outsider and a fraud at times. This made his striving for self-acceptance and for developing a true sense of belonging, all the more intense. The struggle to rediscover and to redefine himself is epitomised by the recurrent use of the term 'schizophrenia' in his reflections on his past. The following extracts from interviews that I conducted with Issachar in 2007 attest to this:

Extract 1 – Issachar (I):

And also then the idea of realness and authenticity – I mean, it was a big part of my – in growing up, in going to model C schools, you know, I adopted the model accent. So there was this idea of having one identity and not being fake or like -. So gaining an understanding

that it's normal, other people go through it as well – I think it feels schizophrenic, other people act differently in different environments and adapt...it's actually a survival technique.

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Extract 2 – Gideon Nomdo (GN):

GN: I mean, growing up in Kensington – what was that like, first of all?

I: It was schizophrenic... Because I was shielded by my parents, and they actively, I suppose, socialised me into a middle class mentality with a working class budget kind of *beweging*... [thing]

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Extract 3

GN: At a different level I'm asking more about how you feel about being classified as Coloured, your thoughts on being Coloured – umm, is it something that bothers you? Is it something that you use in another way or as a tool?

I: Like, I hope this is not too much an apology about the relation but, I mean, I feel comfortable with saying that I hate it and I love it at different times because... I just think like – um – you know, that contradiction – like people who ask or who from the outside either are placed into that box or place themselves into that box – so I'm just confused about – there's a schism, like schizophrenia about it because we don't know how to feel about it because you find yourself then being without a name and then how do you come up with a name? It's an artificial process – you know, people didn't sit up and name themselves in the face of an oppressive name. And then it just becomes too tricky how to decide who is part of that group, who is not. So – because that debate is so tricky, um, you know, we keep 'Coloured' because it's impossible to be without a name, and therein lies the -.

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Extract 4

GN: Your dreads, I mean, it's obviously an association with Rastafarianism – so you'd classify yourself as a Rastafarian or -.

M: Um, I was in flux at that point because people knew me as both – I could go or I could...

There was always a sense of responsibility. With the dreads it just felt like... I just felt more and more like what I'm doing is not for me and it's -. Like I said, it was a huge weight...

GN: So you were initially?

M: Yes, but to a certain point – because I kept on questioning, I never felt a sense of ease – I always felt like a bit of an outsider, and when those questions became too jarring, when they weren't answered sufficiently that's when I started to just, I'm making outward gestures with my hand! [both chuckle].

GN: So you shaved your hair then?

M: Ja.

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The above extracts reveal some of the unease that Issachar experiences in the home and school settings, as well as his predicament about being classified as 'Coloured'. His sense of unease becomes the basis of the 'schizophrenic' label he attaches to himself. He finds that he is constantly traversing two contradictory worlds without having a real sense of belonging in either one. The dichotomy he experiences includes his historically disadvantaged status versus attending Model-C (previously White only) schools; having access to elite higher education privileges versus an acute awareness of mass exclusion of the marginalised; an affinity with working class social attachments versus the practice of middle class idealism; the antagonistic relationship between identity markers of what it means to be Black versus Coloured; the desire for membership in an established religious tradition versus the multi-faceted spiritual quest for inner peace. These reveal some of the multiple conflicts which Issachar is confronted with, and is reminiscent of the anxiety which Giddens (1991) identifies as part of having to choose between competing possibilities.

Issachar's quest to belong to a specific social community extends beyond the mere acceptance by others of his membership. It concerns his own feelings of self-acceptance as a legitimate member of that group. His 'fateful moment' can be described as a journey of self-discovery where he has to confront and reconcile the schizophrenic nature of his being. There appears to be a contradiction between what he displays through external identity markers (e.g. dreadlocks and Model-C schooling pupil), and the lack of conviction and authenticity that he feels when he acts in accordance with such markers. Earlier in chapter two I discussed how a lack of continuity between external displays of identity and the internal self can lead to conflict. Giddens (1991) explains this conflict in terms of a disturbance to the harmony between the 'performances' of 'normal appearances' which individuals' produce and their biographical narratives of self-identity. The participation in the ordinary everyday routines become 'staged' and the individual finds him or herself merely going through the motions of everyday life in an increasingly mechanical and senseless manner (Giddens 1991). In severe cases this growing distance between the performance and the biographical narrative of self-identity can result in what Laing calls an 'unembodied self' (cited in Giddens 1991:59). This lack of harmony between performance and a sense of self is what Issachar is confronted with.

Issachar states the following of the identities that he has adopted, 'I mean, I've always been a good imitator, a good actor – so for me it's been like learning how to sound authentic' (Issachar interview, 2007). Issachar's intense motivation to gain some form of 'mastery' (Giddens 1991) over the techniques of how to fit into various social groupings and contexts resembles in part the

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‘unification versus fragmentation’ dilemma identified by Giddens (1991). Issachar’s predicament and by implication his ‘fateful moment’ revolves around his inability to experience ‘realness and authenticity’ in many of the contextual relationships that frame his life. In the Heideggerian sense, Issachar leads a life which is not owned by him. This loss of ownership renders an ‘inauthentic... fallen self,’ which is a sense of self that is lost to the ‘they-self’ (Wheeler 2013:np), which comprises those social groupings and institutions that Issachar seeks to become part of. It is the ‘they’ which acts to ‘prescribe the kind of Being of everydayness’ (Heidegger 1927 cited in Wheeler 2013:np). In this situation the true self is experienced as ‘empty and inauthentic’ (Wheeler, 2013), unable to be filled by the identities in which Issachar immerses himself. This can be seen in extract 4 above, when he confesses the unease he felt about his Rastafarian status; ‘... because I kept on questioning, I never felt a sense of ease – I always felt like a bit of an outsider...’. So while *others* acknowledged his membership status, *he* was the one who questioned and felt guilty about such membership. An example of this can be seen when he reflects on his childhood in the Coloured suburb of Kensington, of being able to go camping while his poorer Coloured friends in the community could not. On route to the camping site he remembers hiding away in the vehicle so that his friends would not see him; ‘I just felt hideous about it, like always – and I still do’ (Issachar interview, 2007). He struggles with reconciling his relative privilege with his position of acceptance amongst his peers and others he identifies with. In terms of Erasmus’ (2001) analysis of Coloured identity in Cape Town, the types of contradictions experienced by Issachar ‘is part of the pain of being coloured’. What we are faced with therefore, on a much broader social level after twenty years of democracy, are some of the lingering ramifications of the imposition of divisive racial categories. These were geared towards upholding the apartheid state’s policy of racial, socio-political and economic segregation, a policy that sought to eradicate any sense of ‘mine-self’ amongst Black groupings. An indirect result of apartheid policy was that it also created stark differentiations and inequality amongst and also within those Black groupings themselves, especially along class lines.

### Devising strategies to cope with the contradictions and lack of authenticity

The desire to belong on equal terms with those who share in the spaces that Issachar occupies, becomes a source of great tension and guilt for him. One of the strategies he uses to cope with these feelings of conflict is to learn at a very intense level, how to navigate and negotiate the seemingly contradictory worlds he inhabits. Issachar’s mastery (cf Giddens 1991) over the discourses operating in these different social contexts allows him to function on a normal everyday

basis. Through carrying out the routine activities associated with a particular lifestyle in these various contexts, he is able to uphold normal appearances that allow him some semblance of ontological security with which to keep his protective cocoon intact (cf Giddens 1991). Drawing on Goffman's analysis of performance (1971 in Giddens 1991), Giddens emphasises the extent to which controlled public performances are an indication 'of being accepted (trusted) by others as competent' (1991:57). As Giddens (1991) observes, this enables the narrative of self-identity to endure. Such a perspective sheds light on the importance Issachar attributes to the performative displays of his identity, for example, as a Rastafarian. The mastery of such performances is indicative of an adaptive strategy which he utilises in order to fit in and to gain a sense of belonging and purpose in his life. He not only wants to fit into the contexts which make up his social reality, he wishes to epitomise the identities defined by those contexts. At the same time his self-confessed mastery of the hegemonic discourses underlining such public displays of conformity, heightens his growing awareness of the importance of 'not being fake'. Issachar is therefore sharply aware of the conflicts in his life and the tensions which arise out of the options which he is confronted with. It is this awareness of the tensions he faces that are manifested in his feelings of 'schizophrenia'. He is therefore not pathological in the sense that a 'false self overrides and blankets out the original acts of thinking, feeling and willing which represents the true motivation of the individual' (Giddens 1991:191). This is especially so since the pathology that Giddens hints at, would repress the type of awareness that Issachar possesses, which is not the case.

So although the performative aspects of his identity are synchronised and sanctioned within the contexts in which such identities are expected to operate, the feeling of oneness and unity with others that he wants to experience through the performance of such identities, is absent. His performance and acts of assimilation into the 'they-self' effectively block off any opportunity for the 'mine-self' to emerge. Heidegger's explanation of *Dasein* as 'Being-in-the-world' is made clear through the use of the term 'dwelling' (Wheeler 2013), and is useful for understanding Issachar's predicament; 'To dwell in a house is not merely to be inside it spatially... it is to belong there, to have a familiar place there' (Heidegger cited in Wheeler 2013:np). Issachar's inability to actualise a sense of 'mine-self' is therefore at the root of much of his struggle in trying to develop a feeling of true belonging. He experienced much of his formative and teenage years in this manner, living up to the performances required to validate his acceptance in various social groupings, but being very aware of the growing disconnect between the performance and the sense of 'realness and authenticity' he was searching for. This was illustrated in extracts 1 and 4 above, when he states:

And also then the idea of realness and authenticity – I mean, it was a big part of my – in growing up, in going to model C schools, you know, I adopted the model accent. So there was this idea of having one identity and not being fake or like -... There was always a sense of responsibility. With the dreads it just felt like... I just felt more and more like what I'm doing is not for me and it's -. Like I said, it was a huge weight... because I kept on questioning, I never felt a sense of ease – I always felt like a bit of an outsider... (Issachar interview, 2007)

The broader social constructs of race and class within the South African setting have done much to influence issues of 'realness and authenticity' in Issachar's expressions of what it means to be a non-white South African. Issachar's lack of certainty in being able to self-identify in racial terms is indicative of the extent to which the structures of apartheid have, and continue to impact individual expressions of identity, particularly amongst Coloured South Africans. This signals the enduring impact of Apartheid in a democratic South African setting, where the marker of race continues to underline conflicts of identity. As outlined in extract 3 of Issachar's interview above, he finds himself feeling conflicted about being classified as Coloured. This is what he stated earlier:

I feel comfortable with saying that I hate it and I love it at different times because... that contradiction – I'm just confused about – there's a schism, like schizophrenia about it because we don't know how to feel about it because you find yourself then with being without a name and then how do you come up with a name? It's an artificial process – you know... And then it just becomes too tricky how to decide who is part of that group, who is not. So – because that debate is so tricky... we keep 'Coloured' because it's impossible to be without a name.... (Issachar interview, 2007)

These conflicted feelings are intensified when the label of Coloured is compared with the experience of being a Black African. Here Issachar experiences another sense of disconnectedness in that he does not feel at liberty to truly identify as a 'Black' South African, since such a stance would attract criticism from those who were classified as Black South Africans under Apartheid. The sense of uncertainty and of 'not knowing' experienced by Issachar, sheds light on the ambiguous nature of his Coloured status (which Erasmus 2001 alludes to). His sense of uncertainty is also derived from 'feelings of shame and discomfort' associated with being Coloured (Wicomb 1998). Giddens (1991) links this type of shame to the self-integrity of the individual, who has 'repressed fears' about the ability of the self-identity narrative to 'withstand engulfing pressures on its coherence or social acceptability'. Issachar therefore finds occupying such a racially charged identity a bit tenuous. He states:

Ja, there's always the feeling that -. There's always the feeling for me at least of shame that you weren't oppressed enough, you know, oppressed to the degree of 'Blackness' that makes you comfortably... say – you know, you are 'Black' and you have a shared experience. (Issachar interview, 2007)



Issachar's reactions to occupying or taking on an identity that he may or may not have a right to, exposes him to scrutiny by those who share in the 'social reality' of being Black Africans, where he is held 'accountable to others,' having to 'justify' the Black status he has taken on (Shotter 1984 cited in Shotter 1993). His adoption of a black consciousness philosophy through his exposure and participation in the hip-hop music genre, allows him some respite from the perils of being 'without a name'. At this point, through the influence of older hip-hop companions, he becomes a member of the group called *Alkemy* and develops a particular type of socio-political consciousness that enables him to slowly confront and unravel the layers that have buffered his true self. He explains how he began to develop a sense of self awareness in *Alkemy*:

At *Alkemy* it was about rhyming, but then they obviously slipped us a *mickey* (used creative means to include) with the political content, which I always... Ja, I always joked with them about that. It's supposed to be a hip-hop workshop...

We had done a lot of identity stuff in the *Alkemy* workshops – so once I'd begun to grapple with that identity stuff and start to work through my own issues and start to feel comfortable with the idea of having multiple identities... then it became more of an observational exercise rather than investing a whole lot of emotional stuff into it – except when it came to the connection that I have with the work... and being involved with the UCT Worker Support Committee. Then I became continually aware of this race linked to class issue and the divide here at school...

*Alkemy* also did stuff to my identity that became dominant, at a point critical – like socialist political world view became dominant as well, so it just meant like criticizing anything that smelt like capitalism or conservatism. (Issachar interview 2007)

The social structure of *Alkemy* becomes a space to safely explore issues of race and identity, and particularly in Issachar's case, also spirituality. Issachar's comment that he began 'to feel comfortable with the idea of having multiple identities' is an important one; it signals a growing understanding that his identity is as much about choosing as it is about how to avoid choosing. The mentoring that Issachar receives through the structures of *Alkemy* therefore provides him, at one level, with the opportunity of developing 'tools for... debate, tools for analysis' (Issachar interview, 2007). At another level it also affords him the opportunity of developing meaningful relationships with his *Alkemy* mentors, whom he admires for their sense of 'investment' in themselves and aptitude for investing in others, like himself. This growing awareness of his mentors' interests in his personal growth and development, as an individual and not as a Rastafarian, or a Coloured, or as someone who had access to more resources than those who grew up around him, forces him to confront many of the contradictory aspects of his identity. He now feels inclined to reconsider and to re-evaluate the nature of the relationships he had developed with those closest to him. In many

respects, *Alkemy* becomes a stimulus for meaningful change in Issachar's life, an idealised version of home. Through these learning encounters with his mentors, Issachar learns how to invest in himself, and not in the performance aspects of his identity which tended to detract from the feelings of authenticity he was searching for. His reference to this issue of investment is very telling:

The idea of investing in myself also came from the introduction to mentors – were like my father's age but who were [short pause] um – I guess were at the same notion of investing in themselves – so that when a young person comes to sit at your feet and they ask you a question, you'd better damn well make sure you can either answer it or find a way to answer it for them – because that is your duty. (Issachar interview, 2007)

But, so, ja, I had to also – just being poep [very] scared that I'm going to be in a position one day where some *laaitie's* (child) going to ask me a question and then I'm going to be like – hey, hey, I'm watching TV now! (Issachar interview 2007)

This understanding of investing in oneself becomes a tool for measuring other people's worth, and causes Issachar to adopt a very superficial 'self-righteous' view of those closest to him, such as his parents. The extract above provides a brief glimpse into Issachar's relationship with his father, and some of the expectations that he perhaps had of the kinds of roles that he wanted his father to fulfil. We are reminded here by Giddens of how the relationship between infant and caretaker impacts ontological development within the infant. In this setting, anxiety comes to the fore in terms of the infant's seeking of approval from caretakers. Fears of loss and separation experienced by the infant, negatively impacts the level of security that such an infant feels and can be 'associated with hostility, generated by feelings of abandonment' (Giddens 1991:46). Drawing on Kierkegaard's (1944 cited in Giddens 1991:48) explanation of anxiety as 'the struggle of being against non-being', Giddens is able to locate 'ontological awareness' as a crucial aspect of what it means to 'be' (Giddens 1981 cited in Giddens 1991). Issachar seems to exhibit some of these feelings of abandonment and resentment towards his parents in the above extract. Giddens (1991) analysis of 'the pure relationship' offers further insight here, and directs attention to issues of reciprocity, mutual commitment and mutual trust as some of the core building blocks underpinning the negotiation of self-identity and ontological security. Issues of trust impact Issachar's relationship with his parents and tend to weaken his feeling of ontological security in the world. The development of 'personal relationships' (Giddens 1991) with his mentors thus increases his awareness and anxiety about the absences and the lack of intimacy in his relationship with his parents.

The previous extracts therefore reveal a particular source of contention for Issachar: his relationship with his parents. This relationship is juxtaposed with the nature of the interactions he has developed with his *Alkemy* mentors. Issachar has been able to develop 'confidence in the caretaking figures' (Giddens 1991), a role which his mentors have come to symbolise. The trust that he has invested in this mentor-mentee relationship is underlined by the 'reliability and integrity' (Giddens 1991) he associates with his mentors. This relationship forces Issachar to reflect quite critically on his relationship with his parents and creates within him feelings of regret, anger and resentment. He expresses these feelings by highlighting his parents' lack of attention or indulgence in his interests, so as to provide a basis for the lack of intimacy he experiences. An example of this is made evident in relation to the framing of his construction of Coloured identity, and his parents' response to this. Issachar identified strongly with the Coloured working class, an ideal which he expressed through the medium of Afrikaans, the mother tongue of many Coloured working class communities. He resorts to particular aspects of Afrikaans used in these communities, namely the informal colloquial sayings and expressions, which he uses to signal his allegiance to a marginalised group. He incorporates these Afrikaans terms into his use of English so as to make this part of his identity present in his encounters within the middle class academic context (more will be said about this later in this chapter). By incorporating this type of language usage in his daily encounters with academia, aspects of which can be seen in the extracts above through the use of terms such as '*smaaked*', 'kind of *beweging*' and '*poep* scared',<sup>1</sup> he asserts ownership over a particular type of Coloured identity. On the home front the use of Afrikaans, however, did not have much status, since his parents occupied an antagonistic stance towards the language:

My mother was forced to speak Afrikaans so she rejected Afrikaans and spoke English – and that already alienated me, you know. So that has been an active process to reincorporate myself into that world linguistically. (Issachar interview, 2007)

Things such as being able to express himself freely through the use of Afrikaans, which he felt he needed to do to affirm his identity, was therefore not forthcoming in his home and he finds himself straddling two worlds. Through the *Alkemy* workshops Issachar finds a new way of compensating for the tension he feels between pleasing his parents and pleasing himself. He makes a conscious decision to overcome the inadequacies of his relationship with his parents by investing in himself and his growth as a person. The latter affords him some leverage in gaining a form of 'active mastery' over his relationship with his parents, so as to enable him 'to ride out the trials' (cf

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<sup>1</sup> English translations: '*smaaked*' (fancied); 'kind of *beweging*' (kind of thing); '*poep* scared' (extremely frightened).

Giddens 1991:193) on the home front. Issachar does this by developing an inflated sense of self-importance and by viewing his parents as being intellectually inferior. He therefore becomes caught up in the process of 'creating a zone of blocked attention and self-deception' (Mezirow 1991:5). Drawing further on Giddens' analysis here, it can be argued that Issachar's feelings of superiority and self-righteousness towards his parents allows him the feeling of being in control. But as stated by Giddens (1991), this form of defence is 'brittle', and Issachar soon realises that the manner in which he was investing in himself was in fact a 'stumbling block' (Mezirow 1991:6) to investing in a more intimate relationship with his parents, and to discovering his true self:

And like I've just recently come to terms with – because I went through a period where for that reason [notion of investing in oneself] I kind of like felt superior to my parents, which is like a crap place to be...  
(Issachar interview, 2007)

It is important to note here that while Issachar was attending the *Alkemy* workshops and grappling with the notion of investing in himself, he was also navigating his Rastafarian identity, and at the same time was also been introduced to some of the teachings of Sufi<sup>2</sup> writers in Islam. As mentioned earlier, he had always felt a bit unsure of his Rastafarian identity, but such insecurity was unable to, at this point, make him shed this identity altogether. At this stage Issachar's exploration of various religious traditions is simply an attempt to find a fit, a space where he would feel comfortable and less conflicted. At this exploratory stage he is engaged in the transformation of 'meaning schemes', which are normal everyday occurrences that simply require corrective strategies (Mezirow 1991). This resonates with Giddens' (1991) notion of 'inconsequential' moments in that it serves no real threat to Issachar's 'protective cocoon' at this stage, despite its fragility. His introduction to Islamic teachings was thus not advanced enough to push him into the direction of adopting a purely Islamic identity. What we witness, therefore, is someone who is juggling identities at this stage, without adhering to any hierarchical structure in terms of preference. This indecisiveness about locating himself in terms of a core identity that would give precedence to a particular type of 'Being-in-the-world' (Wheeler 2013), becomes very unsettling for Issachar. This, coupled with his feelings of superiority and self-righteousness that were beginning to emerge as a result of his *Alkemy* experiences, begins to place immense pressure on the layers surrounding his true sense of self, and by extension, the protective cocoon which allowed him to operate in a routine manner.

<sup>2</sup> Sufism deals with the element of Islamic mysticism.

Issachar's pre-occupation with religion and spirituality also points to a particular type of quest for deeper meaning in life. It seems as if the meanings he has extracted from the other aspects of his life that he has mastered, still leaves him somewhat unfulfilled and this calls to mind Giddens' (1991:201-202) notion of the 'looming threat of personal meaninglessness'. The lack of interconnectedness between the various components of his public performances of identity and the sense of authenticity that he craved makes the need to connect with something more meaningful beyond the realities of his normal routine activities, more intense. Issachar's search for a sense of 'mine-self' is thus vested in his search for external points of reference, which he feels religion and spirituality alone can offer. This process is what Giddens (1991) describes as 'the return of the repressed'. He argues that while 'fateful moments' can be managed within the 'confines of internally referential systems... many such moments... cannot be dealt with without reference to moral/existential criteria' (1991:203). He continues to explain that it is religion that connects an individual's actions to the latter, and it is at this particular juncture in his quest for selfhood that Issachar finds himself.

### **Reaching a cross-road: The time for decisive action**

All of the above brings Issachar to a cross-road in his life. He is forced to acknowledge a particular truth about himself, namely, that the public displays of identity that he had been brandishing, were in fact the very obstacles that were preventing him from being the 'authentic' self he was searching for. The context for coming to this realisation involved his sincere willingness to participate in the *Alkemy* workshops (driven by his need to find answers to his quest for a true sense of belonging) and by extension, the build-up of a trusting and meaningful relationship with his *Alkemy* mentors in this process. He develops a particular attachment to one mentor in particular, someone whom he describes as 'a spiritual counsellor' (Issachar interview, 2007). The issue of trust is significant here, since it enables Issachar to consider taking a very big risk. The element of trust which Issachar places in his mentor becomes the very stimulus for bringing him to the point where he has to make a fundamental choice in his life, fully aware of the fact that he would have no real control over the consequences of this choice. He makes himself vulnerable and submits to the suggestions offered by his mentor, which is something that he never allowed himself to do with his father.

The dilemma regarding authority (cf Giddens 1991) is pertinent here, since the *Alkemy* mentor is able to position himself as an acceptable authoritative figure in Issachar's life, even above that of Issachar's father. Issachar's willing acceptance of his mentor's status and the trust he places in his

mentor's ability to offer proper guidance, is reciprocated with a type of instinctive obedience on Issachar's part. The mentor, through fulfilling his duty as teacher and advisor, is able to fill a very important gap in Issachar's life, a gap left by the lack of intimacy which formed the basis of Issachar's relationship with his father. The nature of this mentor-mentee relationship enables Issachar, as mentioned above, to acknowledge that he has reached a cross-road in his life, but also allows him to take it a step further by embarking on a radical form of action that attempts to resolve the dilemma he is facing. Issachar is thrust out of his comfort zone into a high-risk zone (cf Penteado 2001) to confront those aspects of his constructed identities that have formed a barrier, a disconnect between his 'they-self' and the sense of 'mine-self' he so desperately wants to uncover.

Penteado's (2001) analysis of the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) into school classrooms, where experienced educators have been using their years of teaching experience to accommodate their 'current practice', offers useful insights into the tension between the known and the unknown. Penteado (2001:26) states that experienced educators '[have] a common language to talk about issues related to their practice, and they [feel] they [can] keep control over a variety of situations they would face in the classroom'. This resonates with Giddens' (1991) notion of 'practical consciousness' evident in daily routines, as a way of ensuring a sense of familiarity in a complex and changing world. Teachers are therefore quite comfortable with operating at a level within the classroom that does not require them to alter their teaching approach, hence their reluctance and apprehension that Penteado (2001) alludes to. In Issachar's case his mastery over the social identities that he has adopted, allows him to continue with his 'current practice' in terms of his normal, everyday routines, through which he feels safe and in control. This is his comfort zone. The risk for Issachar is stepping out from behind the safety of the security offered by his social identities, and to search, unprotected, for that which makes him unique and 'authentic'.

### **Issachar's 'Road to Damascus' Moment: The truth that sets him free**

The most visible aspect of Issachar's identity was his dreadlocks. Even though he had reservations about his Rastafarian status, his mastery over the exhibiting of his Rastafarian identity allowed him to navigate the world in relative comfort and safety. He therefore held on to his Rastafarian identity despite the impact that the *Alkemy* workshops were having on him and despite his exposure to Islam. This is part of the 'bracketing' mechanism made possible by his 'practical consciousness,' so as to afford him a sense of normality and to allow for a continuation of the narrative of self. In the

following extract Issachar alludes to the impact which his Rastafarian identity had on others and the extent to which he could manipulate and push the boundaries of that identity, very often at the risk of injury to himself:

I: Rasta allows you to navigate in a way that is not possible any other way... I would walk through Gympie Street [notorious for gangsterism], just as an exercise, just to see if I could get away with it... You know, it would always just be - like in any ghetto, I felt safe everywhere... people would put out their cigarettes for me in taxis...

His dreadlocks, the external marker of his Rastafarian identity, become the pivotal point of debate between retaining the old identity and seeking a new one. His dreadlocks come to represent the conflict, contradiction and lack of authenticity that he experiences in the expression of his peer group identity, racial identity, home identity, class identity and religious identity. The act of shaving his dreadlocks thus comes to represent the initiation of Issachar's 'fateful moment' episode. Like the New Testament biblical figure of Paul of Tarsus, Issachar experiences his own 'road to Damascus' conversion moment. The following interview extract, part of which was presented in chapter five, captures the event:

GN: So you shaved your hair then?

I: Ja[yes].

GN: I mean, was that a radical move on your side or some affirmation of a new statement of -.

I: I'll tell you what it was, actually I've never told this story to anybody. There was an elder who I regarded like very highly, a spiritual counselor. He looked at me one day; I did something well and he said, 'You should shave your dreads, it's getting in the way of your progress'. And, I mean, my father had told me this a million times before - but I trusted this man and he said it's not me speaking, this is my, you know, this is something speaking to me, telling me what -. And he asked me, 'Did you hear that?' I said like, 'Ja', so he said, 'Alright, let's go do it'. And he knew a barber in Salt River.

GN: Mm, on the spur of -.

(this last extract was referred to earlier in this chapter as that which captures the 'fateful moment')

I: Ja, just so. I never thought about it that day; I wasn't going to do it, nobody knew I was going to do it. I was partying with my girlfriend - she *smaaked* [liked] the dreads and me being like mad. I said I have to tell somebody. He said - no, like you don't have to tell anybody, let's go do it. So we did it...

Giddens (1991) explains 'fateful moments' as being constituted by the extent of the impact that particular actions and events have on an individual. A consequence of a 'fateful moment' is that it constitutes a radical departure from the type of individual that existed before the event took place.

In other words, a particular moment is only deemed fateful if it is accompanied by a radical transformation of that individual's sense of self-identity, in terms of the ways in which he or she views, interprets and embeds him or herself in the world.

Issachar's 'fateful moment' episode has a strong religious aspect to it and he reveals aspects thereof, in various instances of his interview. His religious identity has always been a significant part of his make-up, even though he struggles to commit entirely to one specific religious orientation. His religious affiliations are captured in the following sentence: 'I started out Anglican, rejected Christianity because of like my Africanist whatever, [took on]... Rasta, Islam, you know, Sufism' (Issachar interview, 2007). In this sense Issachar's search for self-fulfilment has always been through the medium of religion, which, as Berger (1963 cited in Travisano 1970) claims, offers itself as a counter to the 'uncertainty' and 'flux' associated with identity in the modern era. Giddens (1991) views this continued interest and adherence to religion and spirituality in modern societies as being symptomatic of 'a return of the repressed'. He argues that the necessity created for religion and spirituality revolves around the concern for 'the moral meaning of existence,' something which is lacking in modern institutions where there is more of a focus on certainty and control.

To help assess the degree of identity transformation that Issachar undergoes in the 'fateful moment' episode outlined above, I draw briefly on Travisano's (1970) analysis of the difference between conversion and alternation, which he argues are two distinct types of identity transformations. The manner in which Travisano's analysis is able to add value to the unpacking of Giddens' 'fateful moment' concept has been shown earlier in the literature review section of this thesis. The application of Travisano's work to Issachar's experiences offers useful insights for unpacking the religious and spiritual dimensions of Issachar's 'fateful moment' and allows us to get a glimpse of the intensely radical dimension of Issachar's transformation of self, which is for the most part, spiritual in nature.

Issachar's fateful moment experience resembles Travisano's (1970) concept of 'conversion', since the consequences of this experience is such that his previous, insecure and empty sense of self-identity and the manner in which he locates himself in the world, is drastically altered. The 'fateful moment' conversion experience takes on a special impetus in Issachar's case, both in terms of an internal and external transformation. The magnitude of cutting his dreadlocks is captured in the following statement that Issachar makes immediately after the act, '...and it was just like I felt liberated!' The act of cutting his hair symbolises the outflow of the pressure of having to pretend



and act as something that he felt he was not. The guilt and shame about not feeling authentic is at the core of this euphoric outflow, and it is at this moment that Issachar stands outside the ‘they-self’ which had contained him for so long. On the other hand he is also faced with the harsh realities of his new found freedom. He has to learn how to navigate and negotiate without his previous identities, since these had afforded him certain privileges, protection and a certain amount of recognition in the contexts he frequented. So the emptying of those aspects of his identity which were preventing him from being his authentic self also left him vulnerable and open to attack from others in the social spaces he inhabited. The link between what he experiences as ‘liberating’ to feeling completely vulnerable is uttered in direct sequence, emphasising the vividness of the impact of the ‘fateful moment’ in very real terms. This feeling of vulnerability, captured as part of an earlier extract in this chapter, is presented as follows:

and it was just like I felt liberated. But at the same time, the very same day I was taking a taxi home and some bra wys me, “Hello jy, wie’s jy?” And it was just like, I hadn’t felt that in like four or five years, that I just felt, I fell down to earth. (Issachar interview 2007)

The protection offered by his dreadlocks, as alluded to earlier, was now no longer in play. Issachar is faced with the tough task of building up his sense of self identity in a harsh and antagonistic climate. He is constantly confronted with representations of his previous identities and the beliefs and actions that underline these. His approach to constructing a real self, of mobilising an identity that he felt expressed an authentic sense of being and through which he could engage and build up meaningful relationships, is quite strategic and reflective in nature. He sets about rewriting his biographical narrative to accommodate and reaffirm his new sense of ‘mine-self’ by drawing on all those aspects which he felt gave his previous identities a sense of location and purpose, and which made it strong and resistant to attacks from the outside. He states of this process of building up his new identity:

Ja, ja, ja – because it was a sense also of building the kind of strength that you have on the outside through the dreads, like on the inside, and taking those knocks – like waiting for it and testing yourself – because you don’t really get tested as a – you know, having dreads... just getting more serious and more focused – it’s all about shedding what’s not needed. (Issachar interview 2007)

Through these acts of reflexivity Issachar rebuilds a more secure protective cocoon around his emerging sense of identity. The strong sense of religious symbolism which has always been such an important part of his search for authenticity is very apparent in his ‘fateful moment’ episode. There are strong parallels to be drawn between the cutting of Issachar’s dreadlocks, which begins to strip away the familiar semblances of normality, protection and social acceptance established through

everyday routines, and the Christian biblical story of Samson, who loses God's favour and his super-human strength after being tricked into cutting his hair. Samson's disobedience to God in revealing where his strength lay leads to his downfall. On the other hand is Issachar's self acknowledgement that the display of mastery over his performances of identity leaves him unfulfilled. In each of these stories there is a search for redemption and acceptance: Samson makes a plea for his physical strength to be restored so that he is able to perform one final act of bravery to regain his honour and glorify God; while Issachar seeks to build up a new and fulfilled sense of self identity on the inside, by harnessing the strength previously bestowed on him by virtue of his external identity traits. The difference between these two narratives however, resides in the type of universe of discourse that is constructed: for Samson it is a reconstruction of his previous universe of discourse when his honour and relationship with God was intact. Drawing on his renewed commitment and obedience to God, that is, by readopting his previous informing aspect, he rediscovers the central thrust and purpose of his existence in the world. For Issachar on the other hand, it is the start of constructing a new universe of discourse, in which the performative aspects of his identity are beginning to align with the construction of his biographical narrative of self, setting in motion a process in which his feelings of schizophrenia gradually become minimised. Unlike the finality of Samson's final act of redemption, symbolic of an idealised and utopian sense of authenticity and oneness of being with God, Issachar's act of redemption is the onset of his journey towards achieving authenticity.

The act of transforming one's identity is exemplified by a change in the informing aspect underlining that identity. At the same time Travisano (1970:605) asserts that 'a conversion may not be merely a *change* in informing aspect but a *discovery* of one'. Issachar's self-confessed 'schizophrenia' in terms of race, class and religious affiliations before his 'fateful moment' experience, seems to indicate a lack or even an absence of a core informing aspect in his life, hence his ability to flow from one identity to the next and to adapt so easily to the identities he adopts. Given the overwhelming religious symbolism making up his 'fateful moment', it is perhaps not surprising to find that Issachar discovers and adopts a very particular kind of informing aspect, one which draws strongly on a unifying religious ideology. Through this informing aspect he is able to blend the various aspects of his fragmented identities, reconcile his feelings of schizophrenia and gain a true sense of purpose and belonging. This represents a slight departure from Travisano's (1970) more absolute claim of breaking ties with the past. Issachar breaks those ties that were preventing self-realisation, but then goes about rebuilding those relationships by creating a sense of continuity of

his own presence, his 'mine-self,' across the different contexts in which he lived. This coherence of an 'inner core of self-identity' is kept intact through 'the maintaining of constants of demeanour across varying settings of interaction' (cf Giddens 1991:100). Giddens continues to explain that demeanour is concerned with matching the appropriate actions of an individual to various settings and works to 'sustain a link between feeling at home in one's body' and the personalised narrative' (Giddens 1991). Issachar's new 'personalised narrative' allows him to reflect quite meaningfully on his new found purpose in life, as captured in this extract concerning his movement from Christianity, to Rastafarianism, and then to his later interest in Islamic Sufism:

I: it's just like – oh, now I'm seeing its strains... I knew they all had a purpose but I'm seeing the beauty in all of them...

It's like you know the person that seeks after God consciousness or peace... just always gravitates towards what is beautiful at any point in their life – but you know, you have a sense of what is beautiful and what's right and wrong...

GN: So what's the enduring quality... that you strive to achieve?

I: Constant perfection of the soul. Constantly battling and not suppressing but like – er – purifying that ego... just washing out the shit and allowing that essence to be the one that makes the decisions for you. (Issachar Interview 2007)

The unification versus fragmentation dilemma identified by Giddens (1991) is therefore resolved to a certain extent in Issachar's case. He is able to create and preserve his new and emerging sense of self-authenticity by drawing on and reconceptualising 'elements from various settings into an integrated narrative' (Giddens 1991:190). In confronting and dealing with the problems in his past, Issachar slowly frees himself from 'oppressive emotional habits' (Giddens 1991:78) and opens up opportunities for exploring his new sense of authenticity in the world. This, in Giddens' (1991) terms, constitutes reaching an important state of 'self-actualisation' on the part of the individual.

### **Enacting the New: Addressing social injustice**

This spiritual essence that informs Issachar's integrated narrative allows him to locate his racial identity in a particular way as well. His attendance as part of the UCT-MMUF cohort to the Summer Institute in the USA forces him to express this location, but also to make it relative to other aspects of his identity that now frame and structure his daily experiences. In response to the American MMUF fellows' questions about how he classifies himself within the South African context, Issachar states the following:

- I: And I identified myself there like I do here, like you know, in concentric circles, starting with the biggest one, working down to the smallest one. The biggest one being child of God, the last one being Coloured... It goes, I guess, spark of God, human being, African, Black, Coloured.  
(Issachar Interview 2007)

By the time Issachar begins his studies at UCT, which is shortly after his 'fateful moment' experience, he has developed a strong sense of how and where to locate himself within the university setting, in cultural, racial and class terms. He has a strong sense of 'mine-self' surrounded by a robust and resilient protective cocoon. His new orientation to the world is saturated with a specific religious and spiritual awareness which enables him to define the multiple aspects of his identity, especially race, in very particular terms. At UCT, Issachar therefore makes explicit his stance about his Coloured identity, previously a great source of anxiety for him:

- I: I definitely didn't see myself as being the kind of Coloured that I saw at UCT.
- GN: Mm – what was the difference between the two?
- I: I made a class distinction and I chose to identify with a working class identity. And it's weird because I, [small chuckle] it's also funny to say out loud, but I mean, relatively in my -. I'm very privileged. But then again I live in a – I'm surrounded by the extreme underprivileged and I can't separate myself from them... I think a lot of people don't allow themselves to identify with those that are intrinsically a part of their lives, but I can't do that...
- GN: How would you have defined the Coloured students that you... set yourself apart from at that stage?
- I: Middle class and removed from political responsibility.

Issachar developed a strong sense of political awareness at *Alkemy*. This, coupled with his own sense of privilege relative to that of his neighbourhood friends, intensifies his need to confront issues of injustice and social inequity wherever he encounters it. He takes it upon himself to represent the absence of the masses within the university setting, to give them a voice and a sense of worth. Issachar's liberation from the 'conditions of domination' (cf Giddens 1991) in his past, not only makes the possibilities of choice available, it incorporates a conscious decision of which path to follow. The emancipatory texture of this chosen pathway is grounded in what Giddens (1991:214-215) refers to as 'life politics', which at its core is a politics of choice, lifestyle, and life decisions. Giddens goes on to assert the ability of 'life politics' to place issues of morality and existentialism on the agenda again, in spite of modernity's attempts at silencing such issues (1991). Viewed from within this context, Issachar willingly undertakes an obligation to uphold those conditions relating to the general well-being of humanity, and that of the oppressed South African masses in particular. The unity that he now possesses between the performative aspects of his identity and his

biographical narrative of self is held intact by a core emancipatory life purpose, which flows from his religious and spiritual embeddedness in the world. It is this that gives him a strong voice and a confident presence in his relations and interactions with other people. There is a distinct shift from making *his* concerns and issues the focus in these relationships, to considering the position of *others* in light of how life could and should be lived. The change in Issachar rests on the relationship he develops with his mentors, which provides him with enough confidence to open himself up to learning how to trust again, thereby reinstating a stronger sense of ontological security in the world. Drawing on Heidegger here, we can observe that ‘Dasein stands out in openness to and an opening of Being’ (Wheeler 2013). This gives Issachar the impetus to reconceptualise and reinterpret his relationship with his parents, and the role they play in his life. He moves from his feelings of superiority and antagonism towards his parents, whom he criticised for their lack of investment in themselves (an opinion he formulated when he realised the extent to which his older mentors and advisors at *Alkemy* had invested in their own intellectual and spiritual growth), to the point where he is able to state:

- I: And luckily I was able to work through that where I just realised, you know, [they also] kind of sacrificed. And even the reason that they had to perhaps – you know, like, the fact that they had to sacrifice any kind of, not even like learning in the superficial sense but just that kind of investment itself – and just everything that they did, that they are, helps me to be who I am.  
(Issachar interview 2007)

In this way Issachar’s newly developed sense of ‘authenticity is not about being isolated from others, but rather about finding a different way of relating to others such that one is not lost to the they-self’ (Wheeler 2013). It is this attempt at reconciling with his parents, that I observed at a MMUF dinner organised for the MMUF fellows of Issachar’s cohort, their parents and their mentors. On this occasion Issachar publicly acknowledged the important role his parents played in his life, making a bold and emotional tribute which was reciprocated with a few touching words, tears and a heartfelt hug from his father (this affirmation of his parent’s role in his life and his gratitude towards them was reiterated as part of his feedback on his chapter in this thesis). This public acknowledgement of each other’s worth in the world epitomised the extent of Issachar’s transformation from a lost, angry, insecure and ‘schizophrenic’ individual to one who has moved towards a sense of authenticity, mission, purpose and intimacy in his life.

The focus on structuring and developing the right type of relationships is carried through in his role of representing the voice of the poor and marginalised within the university setting. He makes the latter’s presence felt through engaging in a very particular way at university. He adopts a type of

Coloured working class vernacular in the classroom to prove that despite his accent and medium of expression, he is still able to make valuable intellectual contributions to the debates. In doing so he actively wants to demonstrate to his university peers the extent to which those whom he represents, would be able to navigate in a privileged and elitist intellectualising space, if given the chance:

I: I come here [UCT] and there's people here that can speak this language – I can speak their language very well and even be better than them at it. (Issachar interview 2007)

Issachar consciously defies the stereotypical notion of Coloured students; that of being silent in the classroom. He distinguishes himself through being outspoken and by making his working class social agenda heard in a very particular way. His excellent academic record<sup>3</sup> serves as extra motivation to support his cause.

Issachar takes this a step further by critiquing the extent to which theoretical concepts continue to be viewed at an abstract level, with very little concern about how these concepts play themselves out in real life. This lack of reality within the intellectualising process is what he finds most disturbing, since it detracts from meaningful learning. The lack of awareness amongst his university peers of how various social constructs impact the lives of ordinary people is a constant source of frustration for him. He drives this point home with a reference to Marxist theory, which was a concept being dealt with in one of his courses. He says of his peers attending the course with him:

I: They understand it intellectually like the class theme but it frustrates me when it's spoken about as... an abstract theoretical concept. And things like people all around us... walking past... coming in to clean the classroom afterwards, that live it, that understand Marxism better than the crap that we're talking about. (Issachar interview 2007)

He carries this type of ideology into the MMUF programme, and finds himself clashing with the core aim of the programme, which is to promote and nurture the development of Black academics within institutions of higher education. Issachar's concern is that becoming an academic may be restricted to the intellectualising of knowledge, without any real practical involvement in people's lives. The latter is where he wants his efforts to be directed, as a tangible outcome of his 'life politics' path. He is therefore critical of MMUF's core aim of simply increasing the number of Black academics to increase the numbers of the Black intellectual elite:

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<sup>3</sup> Issachar was awarded his Bachelor of Arts degree with distinctions in Anthropology and History, and was placed on the Dean's merit list. He was awarded a first class pass (79%) for his Honours degree (first year of graduate study at UCT).

- I: It's just about improving Black people's lot but through creating like a privileged class... I'd hate to get to a point where I have to, I'd simply be an academic where I can't be doing stuff on it, you know – obviously stuff I really want to do... that just makes me want to work harder, it makes me want to continue what I'm doing.... I should be doing like ten times more than what I'm doing now. A million times more [of] the kinds of things that my mentors have encouraged me to do.  
(Issachar interview 2007)

At the same time his experiences within the MMUF programme have also brought him to the realisation that academia can create possibilities for change: 'There are reasonable... And there are powerful avenues – I've taken that for granted' (Issachar interview, 2007). This particular realisation makes him reconsider the type of impact that he can make through being *a different kind of academic*, one who internalises, intellectualises but also lives to uphold the accountability and social responsibility of change and transformation in society. He is able to adopt the dominant intellectualising discourses of the university setting, while still being able to redefine his position within these discourses by offering alternate perspectives. This drives home the point made earlier in the conceptual framework chapter about the ability of the self to find 'new ways of being in the world' and new forms of 'citizenship' (cf Shotter 1993).

### Unpacking Issachar's uniqueness in relation to his identity transformation

Issachar's identity transformation is striking in the sense that he has always adopted a discerning attitude towards life. He does not take life for granted and adopts a deeply reflective and acutely analytical stance to everything around him. Everything for him is a search for knowledge and purpose in the world, a learning moment. While many of us do these things sub-consciously, he is consciously engaged in the process of making meaning out of his world, of expanding his horizons. In this sense it seems that one religion or learning philosophy, or even racial classification, cannot bind him. He does not close himself off to life, preferring instead to experience it raw. He is able to draw out things from various experiences, put them aside, and learn from them in a holistic and complementary manner. In this way his quest for growth is never stagnant since he allows himself to embrace, reinterpret and reconfigure aspects of his previous identities to achieve a common purpose. This is evident in his response to the question of why he was growing back his dreadlocks after his 'fateful moment' experience. He states:

- I: Just because I can and it's not going to weigh me down like... like previously, ja [yes] ... because I can shave it if I want to – but it's not like before where I couldn't cut anything because of... vows... So it's just having fun with it really and realising that the mobility that it allows you, it's useful. It was useful before but I've learned how to navigate without it now, and I'm just trying it out [as a] hairstyle.  
(Issachar interview 2007)

In a similar manner Issachar is also able to tap into his previous perceptions of race and constructions of racial identity, with all of its contradictions and feelings of discomfort and dislocation that it held for him. He mobilises his racial and religious identities but without the guilt and the shame he felt previously. His 'fateful moment' removes the ambiguity around his Coloured status, and amidst the possibilities that become available, allows him to select exactly the type of Coloured identity he wants to embody. His newly discovered 'mine-self' makes available a particular way of viewing the world and his location and function therein. This groundedness of self allows him to seek and utilise the unitary elements within the different contexts in which he operates. He regards his focus within these contexts of being Coloured, Black, African, and a child of God, in terms of expanding into 'bigger broader groups and just getting a sense of community' (Issachar interview, 2007). The following extract aptly captures Issachar's relationship with the multiple facets of his identity which, as stated previously, he has arranged in concentric circles:

GN: I just want to get your thoughts on... how strongly does... Coloured or African or Black or a child of the world feature in your future trajectory in terms of finding yourself?

I: I guess... it's the same way in which I see myself as being part of a struggle which moves out in concentric circles away from yourself. There are struggles on each of those levels to grapple with, to fight. So, like, I mean, I can't – it's a part of my make up; it just so happens that I have a set of tools to be able to communicate with like better... in those various concentric circles and for that reason I am able to be of some use in each of those circles in which I can communicate and move, just because of that experience, so it's useful for that reason. I mean, like whatever I'm doing I would like to think until my last breath I'd like to be of some purpose and some use somewhere in the world. So whatever other experiences I am to gain it will hopefully just like, you know, add a couple of new circles so that I'm able to travel or wherever I'm able to be I'm just able to tap into those identity traits that I've gained through that experience.

The nature of Issachar's life quest allows us to make the assumption that the 'fateful moment' that he has undergone, as outlined above, has set in motion a journey that will take him to his next 'fateful moment', which will once again allow him to reinvest in and reconceptualise that core aspect of his identity which has become the driving force in his life. This has recently been illustrated as part of the feedback he provided on his chapter in my thesis, where he made explicit the extent to which his understanding of his identity in terms of 'concentric circles' has changed:

I probably think of it more now in terms of a spiral which is one continuous line but overlaps and comes back and repeats itself rather than concentric circles which don't touch and are made up of separate lines. (personal e-mail correspondence with Issachar, February 2014)



## Informing the fateful moment debate

By drawing on Issachar's experiences above, the conclusion can be drawn that 'fateful moments' can act as a release valve for alleviating the build-up of uncertainty, insecurity and disconnectedness that may accompany participation and interactions in an ever-increasing complex world. In Issachar's case we are presented with small moments, almost insignificant events in his life that continue to build up and continually force him to address the fundamental question underlining and informing his life, namely: 'Who am I?' The 'fateful moment' in Issachar's life is not one isolated, drastic and cataclysmic event. It represents a culmination and a confrontation of a series of events that forces him to make the decision of whom he wants to be. His 'fateful moment' does not cause him to cut his ties and discontinue his previous identities. It provides him with new knowledge, new tools and new resources to reflect on and to rewrite his biographical narrative in a particular way. He is able to address the pauses, the antagonisms and the contradictions that existed between his previous identities and to create a sense of common purpose amongst these. In doing so he imbues his biographical narrative of self-identity with a strong element of coherence. Issachar's 'fateful moment' is thus recognition of his coming of age. It is a statement of redemption and legitimation of his new found self.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **Margaret's Story: "I wore my hair down, I never did that! ... For once I wasn't Colored with a 'u'."**

Margaret's sense of self in the world is strongly influenced by her black consciousness upbringing and is vested in an understanding of herself as being Black. Upon entering university, her fellow Black African students reject her claim of being Black, asserting instead that she is 'Coloured'. However, even her status as 'Coloured' is questioned by other Coloureds. Margaret is therefore continually confronted with the battle between her own sense of self-identity and other racialised categories of identity which various groupings impose on her. Her 'fateful moment' encapsulates this clash between the various 'possibilities for self-hood' (Ivanič 1998), and offers insights into some of the consequences of constructing and asserting a sense of self which is different to, and which does not quite fit into, dominant, established identity categories that exist in the public sphere. This misalignment between a highly individualised philosophical understanding of the concept of Blackness and the appropriation of a particular construction of Black identity on the broader South African socio-political and cultural landscape, will receive attention in this section. I trace Margaret's struggle with gaining personal and social affirmation for the way in which she wishes to present herself to the world, and I show how her search and struggle for a sense of authenticity finds a home in the MMUF programme. For Margaret, being in the MMUF programme means 'not merely to be inside it spatially... it is to belong there, to have a familiar place there' (Heidegger cited in Wheeler 2013:np). I illustrate how her experience within MMUF leads to the creation of a new self-identity and a coherent biographical narrative through which she redefines her role, purpose and mission in life.

#### **A fateful moment in the life of Margaret**

I'm from a BC (black consciousness) background. I thought that I would come to UCT and I would be accepted by the 'Black' community and one of my 'Black' friends... turns to me and like 'So what are you, Margaret? What are you?'... I don't know what to answer because I know the answer that she's expecting, which will be 'Coloured,' so I was like 'I'm so-called Coloured but I'm Black'... I thought I would be accepted as a Black person as well but I found just as much if not more othering from them that I was not like them, I was 'other' and I was 'Coloured' – and that was a revelation and it's a root of lots of resentment and disillusionment on my part.  
(Margaret interview, 2007)

The 'fateful moment' episode captured in the above extract takes place at a very important time in Margaret's lifespan, when she is transitioning from her Coloured high school into the cosmopolitan higher education context of UCT. I showed earlier through my discussion of Ivanič's (1998) analysis of mature students' experiences of university life within the British higher education system, that students of colour in SA often experience similar symptoms of anxiety and self-doubt when they enter historically White university settings for the first time. In Margaret's case this transition was not as traumatic, given that her older siblings' previous exposure to higher education was something that she could draw on. Her father's status as a biology lecturer and struggle-activist at a Coloured teacher's training college also gave her some additional insights into student life and the science field that she was going into, aspects that she was eager to embrace upon coming to UCT.

Adhikari's (2005:5) historical analysis of Coloured identity in SA reveals that during the late 1970's 'educated and politicized' individuals classified as 'Coloured' (such as Margaret's father), turned towards black consciousness ideology and used it as a means to challenge and reject the label of 'Coloured' imposed by the apartheid regime. Against this backdrop of her father's influence and tutelage, Margaret grew up as a child of the black consciousness movement, which was not the case for Issachar, who was exposed only when he started to take his hip-hop training seriously through participating in Alkemy workshops. From a young age Margaret was therefore engaged in the process of internalising and appropriating the teachings and practices of black consciousness, to the extent that she is able to say, 'I think it cemented my character and my identity's strong, I'm entrenched in it' (Margaret interview, 2007). Margaret's entry into university thus signalled a significant shift in concretising her status as 'Black', something she was not really able to do at her local Coloured high school, given that she was still developing an awareness of her self-identity. University thus symbolised a point in her life where her black consciousness orientation could come to fruition, where it could be practiced and publically displayed in an intellectual and diverse space which she assumed both allowed for and also accepted an individual's right to be different. She states, 'I just thought I would come to UCT and it would be like this utopia of egalitarianism' (Margaret interview, 2007). It is against this background of high anticipation and excitement of becoming and being accepted as a Black South African, that Margaret experiences her 'fateful moment' of despair and disillusionment, when her attempt at self-realisation is rejected: "I was completely unprepared for the 'othering' and... how they would cast something as... 'Colouredness' onto me... I felt so very angry about that" (Margaret interview, 2007).

Margaret's 'fateful moment' episode vividly depicts the tenuous nature of laying claim to an identity to which access was previously controlled and determined by one's location on apartheid's racial classification grid. In this instance, being non-White did not automatically make her Black, since she did not possess any of the visible markers that would have allowed her access to this identity. Her black consciousness orientation which gave her grounding and purpose in life, was found to be insufficient for gaining access to a status shared by her Black African peers, for which race was the overriding factor. Erasmus (2001) offers an insightful exploration of the precarious position of Coloured identity in a post-apartheid SA. She raises the issue of 'an emergent discourse of African essentialism... [where] blackness is understood in terms of Africanness, and black or African... authenticity... while whiteness is associated with Europe, in-authenticity, domination' (Erasmus 2001:20). Erasmus concludes that such essentialist constructions severely restrict the opportunities for 're-imagining coloured identities in post-apartheid South Africa' (2001:21). The restrictions placed on the possibility for transforming racial identities has also been echoed by Steyn's (2005) work in her analysis of 'White Talk' in the post-apartheid setting. Steyn argues that Whites have been strategising in a number of ways to preserve positions of White privilege and authority in SA's new political arena, which has placed the responsibility of incorporating change in the hands of Black South Africans.<sup>1</sup> This type of explanatory framework seems to reflect Margaret's experiences outlined above. In chapter two, I mentioned Shotter's (1993) claim that the spaces we occupy as individuals within 'the same sea of creative interrelational activity', are not neutral, and are subject to the scrutiny of others who share in the same 'social reality'. As an individual entering the cosmopolitan social reality of UCT, Margaret thus becomes 'answerable or responsible to other' (Shotter 1984 in Shotter 1993) Black African (mainly South African) UCT students for wanting to occupy a space that they have fought so hard to gain access to. Therefore, in spite of her access into the general UCT space, she still finds that her 'passage into certain regions of it' (Shotter 1993) is severely limited. Operating within a context of limited choices for the realisation of self also signals that the 'mediational means' that such an individual will have access to:

Is unequally distributed, and dependent on people's social circumstances such as education... and interpersonal networks. This means that some people's 'toolkit' will be bigger, and/or contain more statusful "tools" than others. (Ivanič 1998:53)

<sup>1</sup> Also see Steyn and Foster's (2007) discussion for more insight into the manner in which Whites locate and position themselves in the democratic South African setting.

Ivanič's (1998) claim about the differentiated nature of the 'toolkit' that individuals' bring along with them into the higher educational setting, suggests that the rejection of Margaret's claim to a Black identity occurs as a result of having had a racial identity imposed on her, which in this case is her Colouredness. Historically, Coloureds were granted a more privileged status by the apartheid regime so as to distinguish them from their Black African counterparts. Margaret finds that the memory of such historical divisions is something that she struggles to escape from in the democratic South African setting. Her perceived Colouredness is therefore deemed by other Black students to be incommensurable with Blackness.

This act of rejection leaves her in limbo, without any real sense of social location and grounding. Margaret is caught between an identity which has been imposed upon her and one which she yearns for, and to which she is struggling to gain access. Such access has been denied by those who deem themselves to be the authentic bearers of Black South African identity. This, as indicated by Erasmus (2001) above, alludes to an essentialist construction of Blackness, in which no allowances are made for other possibilities of Black identity to emerge. This loss of a sense of self leaves Margaret feeling anxious about her relationship with a world which she thought she knew, a world which she was 'no longer at home in' (Heidegger cited in Wheeler 2013).

Using Meizerow's (1991) 'lifeworld' concept, which he uses to indicate the extent to which 'sedimented' beliefs and practices can be overcome, offers an explanation of how the rejection suffered by Margaret impacts her state of 'Being-in-the-world' (Heidegger cited in Wheeler 2013). Margaret moves from a 'self-evident lifeworld', in which her black consciousness upbringing has provided her with a seemingly strong sense of ontological security, into a university setting where that lifeworld is rejected and placed under threat by a 'disorientating dilemma' (Mezirow 1991). The 'disorientating dilemma' is presented as a supposed incompatibility between her imposed status as a Coloured individual with a strong black consciousness orientation on the one hand, and her desire to be regarded as 'Black' amongst Black African students on the other. This disorientating incident disrupts Margaret's established everyday routines and forces her to engage in a 'transactional dialogue' (Mezirow 1991), where she has to reflect on the validity and impact of her rejection and what it means for her sense of location and grounding in the world. The state of turmoil and emotional distress that Margaret experiences in relation to her Colouredness and Blackness seems to indicate an incompleteness of self and points to some of her own insecurities pertaining to the question: 'Who am I?' It is important to note here that her family has granted her the space to

pursue her own interests since childhood, and they certainly did not pressure her into following any particular path. Her adoption of black consciousness and her love of art and 'White' music are interests that she had to defend throughout her youth. These interests endure throughout her schooling, so by the time she leaves school, she has already been fighting for and thinking through her identity quite vigorously. There is a possibility then, that she already has some modicum of 'mine-self' (Heidegger cited in Wheeler 2013) by the time that she arrives at UCT. The transition from her all-Coloured high school into the cosmopolitan UCT setting brings with it a new set of challenges for Margaret. These challenges expose an under-developed 'mine-self' whose protective cocoon is rendered vulnerable through its first real personal confrontation with a Black African student population eager to preserve the boundaries of Black identity. Margaret's entry into UCT thus becomes the second time that she has to defend and rethink her identity.

Margaret's situation becomes even more complicated by the questioning of her 'Coloured' status by Coloureds, who on numerous occasions have told her: 'Oh, you don't look Coloured... you don't look like you're supposed to look' (Margaret interview, 2007). This is the type of stereotypical gaze that Margaret is confronted with and which she cannot escape. She finds herself constantly resisting the manner in which other people make judgements about her based on her external features. In this sense, Margaret seems to share in Erasmus' (2001:25) call for the adoption of a position in SA that "challenges the notion that your politics, your alliances and your right to speak can be read off from 'who you are and/or what you look like'". Margaret's struggle for inserting herself in the world in any meaningful way therefore also forms part of the larger struggle for the acknowledgement and acceptance of difference in SA.

Mezirow (1991), reflecting on the nature and impact of disruptions to identity, also moves from the cognitive to a slightly more existentialist stance when he reminds us that any drastic event that calls into question those perspectives and 'personal values' that ground us, can 'threaten our very sense of self'. Margaret thus finds herself at a crossroad in her life, in that she is faced with a situation which appears to be 'both highly consequential and problematic' (Giddens 1991) in her search for a sense of authenticity that would signal her 'embeddedness' in the world (Corrie and Milton 2000).

### **A non-traditional Coloured upbringing: Home, school and black consciousness**

The data comprising Margaret's reflective narratives indicate quite vividly the extent to which, from a young age, she had to assert and defend her interests in her home and school environments.

Engaging with people who challenged her choices and interests became routine, and offered her the opportunity to assert herself as an individual who was responsible for and willing to shoulder the consequences of her choices:

Ag, my interests, that's what I have to protect all the fucking time. The music I listen to [GN: Which is?] rock and alternative rock and it's like – 'oh, that's White music'... I've always felt like I had to defend – I'm talking about my high school, primary school... I always had to defend everything I did culturally... the stuff I like to do... Like the art stuff and the music stuff, and I like to chat about the things I'm passionate about... Even now – like I'm a comic book fan, I have to defend that. I have to defend my fucking discipline... my atheism... the things that hold near and dear to me I felt I had to defend...that has a lot to do with my identity – and that comes from the fact that I had defended. As soon as I started calculating my own interest like around the age of eleven I started defending.

(Margaret interview, 2007)

The development of Margaret's defensive repertoire was scaffolded by the nature of the relationships that were established within her home. She grew up in an atmosphere where freedom of choice was encouraged and supported. She marvels at her parents' ability to sustain this type of interest in their children. She describes their dedication as follows:

My parents have supported us through every freaking little fucking interest... And then I was like the third kid – I'm like – aren't these people tired?

(Margaret interview, 2007)

She draws special attention to her parents' liberal attitudes towards education and religion, and uses this to distinguish the non-traditional nature of her 'Coloured' household. The emphasis placed on the importance of education and educational choice features high on the list of Margaret's non-traditional Coloured household. She speaks inclusively about this when she states that:

We value education and learning. It's never 'you know your place, you can't dream big or have a big goal'. It's like it's not a shame if you don't want to study further but if you want to we will support you all the way... and I don't think that other -. Well, from my perspective, what I could see from my extended family and the limited friends that I did have – that wasn't valued, it was like – as long as you can pay your way, as long as you make matric even, and you bring back your pay packet at the end of the week or the month or whatever – it's fine... There was not a culture or -. There was no instilled belief in doing better or education's okay, it's okay to want to do this. So that's what I meant by 'a non-traditional home'.

(Margaret interview, 2007)

She substantiates this non-traditional stance further by foregrounding her family's academic achievements – her father has an MSc and is a college lecturer; her sister is a physicist; her brother is an accountant; and she is following a geneticist career path. She is quite adamant that her family's intellectual pursuits are not motivated by the financial rewards that these achievements

could accrue, but by the distinct interest in the pursuit of knowledge about the world. Margaret uses this as another distancing mechanism between her family and other 'Coloured' families. She states:

It's like we value material things less and I think we value experiences more, like doing stuff. I would still to this very day, I'd rather do stuff than actually buy clothes and have nice jeans, and all that, which I think is very entrenched in so-called Coloured communities – like valuing your self-worth by material possessions. So that's also, I think, very non-traditional on our part.  
(Margaret interview, 2007)

The religious sphere is perhaps where Margaret gains her greatest sense of individual agency, in that she is allowed to decide on the path that she wishes to follow. As a child she was influenced by the non-conformist actions of her father and older siblings in asserting their right not to attend church with their mother. The actual choice of deciding whether or not to follow a particular religious tradition, however, remains Margaret's, which is something she has come to appreciate and respect:

So at a point I grew up in an environment where it was an unspoken truth and enforced by the way we interacted – that your belief systems, that is your choice; that I couldn't have forced anything down on you. And the great thing about that is – the information was there all the time. So it wasn't like there was nothing there. So obviously I got the Christian influence and the Muslim influence from my community... But there was a nice counter-balance with all the scientists and the biological evidence... So that's why I said non-traditional, definitely with the whole religious aspect.  
(Margaret interview, 2007)

Her decision to embrace black consciousness can therefore also be viewed against this backdrop of being part of a non-traditional Coloured family. Her black consciousness orientation is something she chose, felt comfortable with and aspired towards. It provided her with a sense of location and mission in life, and in the absence of religion, gave her a philosophical basis for her sense of '*Dasein*'. This freedom of choice, her relationship with her parents, the value system that she developed and her pursuits of cultural enrichment provides her with the tools for distancing herself from the label of being called 'Coloured', and within this context the multiple references to the term 'non-traditional Coloured' becomes a pseudonym for that which is something *other* than Coloured. Black consciousness becomes a referential framework for deconstructing the ideological imperatives embedded within the historical construction of Colouredness in SA. As an internalised identity, black consciousness frees Margaret from being weighed down by an imposed 'Coloured' identity from which she is unable to extract any real sense of individual self. Her black consciousness orientation ushers in the shedding of the label 'Coloured' and provides her with an intellectual and experiential basis to call herself Black. Viewed from this context, Margaret's black



consciousness orientation resembles Goffman's (in Giddens 1991) idea of '*Umwelt*' referred to earlier, where '*Umwelt*' is understood as:

A core of (accomplished) normalcy with which individuals and groups surround themselves... which enframe the individual's life... a 'moving' world of normalcy which the individual takes around from situation to situation. (Giddens 1991:127-128)

Margaret's black consciousness identity is therefore not out of place within her home setting, which encompasses a discourse of engagement with the ideals of the South African liberation struggle. She attended Coloured schools, where she had few friends and asserted her difference in this setting through her interests in rock music and art. Given some of the obvious tensions between Coloureds and Black Africans in the Western Cape, very successfully engineered by the apartheid regime's policy of placing Coloureds above Black Africans, the assumption can perhaps be made that Margaret purposefully kept her black consciousness orientation hidden in the school setting, so as to avoid unnecessary stigmatisation.<sup>2</sup> As was the case with Issachar's Rastafarian identity, there is also a lack of unity between Margaret's performance of being 'Coloured' and the construction of her biographical narrative of self. Entering university thus offered her the opportunity to present a seemingly authentic mine-self and to engage without being hemmed in by the restrictions of her Coloured identity. However, as was shown, such hopes are shattered when she encounters the traditional and conservative boundaries policing the very space she needs to access in order to validate her new identity (Travisano 1970). Having being cast into a state of disorientation, Margaret is forced to hold onto those unwanted fragments of her 'Coloured' identity which at least provide her with some sense of location, albeit fragile, within the contexts in which she operates.

### **Operating within the mundane: 'Home Margaret' and 'MCB Margaret'**

The situation that Margaret finds herself in can be viewed in terms of Giddens' (1991) identification of the unification versus fragmentation dilemma, discussed earlier. Margaret has constructed an emerging 'mine-self' (Heidegger cited in Wheeler 2013) around a set of fixed commitments (Giddens 1991), which she has derived from her black consciousness orientation. This black consciousness orientation becomes the main lens, or the main informing aspect (Travisano 1970) which Margaret uses to filter her interactions with the world. In terms of Giddens' (1991)

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<sup>2</sup> For more insights into the tensions between Blacks and Coloureds in the Western Cape, see James, Caliguire and Cullinan (1996).

framework for unpacking the self, Margaret adopts a 'rigid', 'compulsive' and uncompromising stance, with no allowances being made for a possible reinterpretation of her black consciousness ideology or the adoption of another informing aspect. The particular belief system informing her outlook on the world becomes 'sedimented' (Corrie and Milton 2000), causing her to be less responsive to change. She resorts to identifying with only two core fragments of her self-identity which correlates very strongly with the primary spaces in which she carries out the bulk of her daily routines. The two spaces to which Margaret confines her expression of self are the home space and the university microbiology (MCB) space where she spends most of her day. Margaret describes the 'home' aspect of her sense of self as an isolated and lonely figure, without much depth and character. 'Home Margaret' simply goes through the motions of the day without any real sense of investment in the world beyond the home self; 'Home Margaret doesn't do anything, she studies and listens to music and watches TV. She's just kind of there' (Margaret interview, 2007).

'MCB Margaret', like 'home Margaret', also seems to be limited to the space in which that identity is utilised. The MCB component seems to be borne out of the need to fulfil a particular academic responsibility towards completing and fulfilling the requirements of her degree. Margaret has very little choice as to who she interacts with in this rather structured space, since such interactions have a direct bearing on the awarding of the degree itself. There is no real meaningful investment in these MCB relationships as Margaret is confined to the interactions permitted by her fragmented 'MCB' self. She therefore presents aspects of her self-identity related to scientific discourse practices, which draws on aspects of objectivity, validity, reliability, accuracy, rationality and so forth. As our discussion of Mead's (1934) theory of identity showed earlier, the self is comprised of the 'I' and the 'me'. The 'I' is that portion of the self 'that responds freely, creatively, and spontaneously,' while the 'me' portion relates to those aspects to which the self as social 'actor' knowingly conforms and submits to, such as 'attitudes, expectations, beliefs, understandings, and perspectives about the self that have been learned from others' (Milliken and Schreiber 2012:690). As a direct result of her 'fateful moment' in which her status as 'Black' in the university setting is not acknowledged, Margaret's 'me' aspect of self comes to resemble Heidegger's 'they-self', an inauthentic self that conforms to what is expected of her in group situations, such as in the MCB space above. This enacting of a 'they-self' takes on a routine nature that tends to dominate her sense of being in these spaces, and it is this that prevents her from establishing a personal sense of coherence and grounding in her life.

Despite the limits being placed on her realisation of an authentic self, Margaret is fully aware of the nature of her engagements within the above settings. I will elaborate more on this notion of an authentic self later in this section, so as to add more of an existential basis to Mead's analyses. Like Issachar, she is able to be reflective, and to evaluate her experiences of reality. Her inability to realise other possibilities of being has made her fully aware of the alternative, namely, her own complicity in submitting to a 'they self'. But it is this very awareness of her own complicity in creating an inauthentic self that also becomes the stimulus for developing an internal resistance to her seeming conformity to a state of inauthenticity. In this sense she is fully aware of the defence mechanisms she has developed as 'MCB Margaret' that allow her to 'get through the day without screaming' (Margaret interview, 2007). She therefore still possesses a degree of agency, in that she is still actively engaged in resisting and challenging the dominant MCB discourses in which she participates. The objective nature of Margaret's discipline, the focus on issues of reliability, validity and replicability which are pursued in the name of scientific certainty and knowledge about the contemporary world's survival, falls short of allowing her to shed light on her own identity crisis. It is within this context of scientific certainty that Giddens' (1991) reinstates issues of morality and existentialism to deal with issues relating to the nature of being human, since modern structures are unable to account for these. What we are presented with here is an ongoing struggle for self-hood (Ivanič 1998). The shattering of Margaret's search for self-hood through being denied a Black identity status has set in motion internal acts of resistance that would not be as prone to public criticism as the assertion of her black consciousness orientation. As part of a reflexive process, she finds herself confronted with the challenge of how to replace or even reclaim the certainty and groundedness previously provided by her black consciousness upbringing. The experience of this loss of authority in her life creates a dead space, a space which she is caught up in, living out a mundane, tedious mode of existence. It is during this stage of emptiness and lack of fulfilment in her life that she is awarded a MMUF Scholarship, a critical event (Ivanič 1998) which signals the start of a new lease on life, a radical shift in terms of how she views and values herself, her friendships, and her purpose and mission in the world. The argument presented here, therefore, is that the MMUF space becomes the stimulus for creating other possibilities for the realisation of self. The fateful moment episode in Margaret's life where she is denied her status as a Black South African student is intricately connected to her entry into MMUF and the discovery of an authentic self therein.

## Becoming an MMUF fellow: A rediscovery of self and purpose

The MMUF space, with its strong equity development agenda and its focus on race and identity issues within the academy, offers Margaret a safe platform on which to openly debate issues of race. Like Margaret, her UCT MMUF peers, (Issachar is a part of Margaret's MMUF cohort), also have a strong sense of socio-political awareness. They are also passionate about their beliefs and values, which they too have had to defend most of their lives. By creating a safe intellectualising space to navigate issues of race, identity and change within the post-apartheid academic setting, the MMUF Programme not only encourages debate, it also acknowledges and affirms difference. Furthermore, because of its investment in transformation, a particular ideological imperative underlines the MMUF coordinating, mentoring, Summer Institute and conferencing structures. These work together to provide the MMUF fellows with some of the tools they need to debate and defend the positions they occupy. There is a sense, therefore, in which the SA MMUF space forces Black fellows from diverse socio-cultural, class and religious backgrounds out of their comfort zones into a common space to acknowledge and confront the uncomfortableness associated with discussing issues of race and identity within contemporary SA. This deconstruction of race and the manner in which it impacts reality forms part of a larger process of teaching MMUF fellows how to develop a sense of empowerment through being different and presenting other possibilities of being to the world. It is through engaging with this discourse of empowerment that MMUF fellows begin to value their worth in a different light.

This, then, is the space which Margaret enters, albeit hesitantly at first: 'I just thought [laughter in voice] you guys picked the wrong [person]... I didn't believe that I was an intellectual at that point and believe I was an academic... I'm going to mess it up' (Margaret interview, 2007). Upon letting herself open to the experience she discovers new things about herself and the path that she is on. She states upon reflecting on the impact of the MMUF Programme:

I realised how important the teaching aspects are for being a PhD and that has given me positive reinforcement and I'm not just all about – it's less selfish now... I am still driven, I still put myself first – and I know that I can... make an impact at least on somebody who is sitting in my class... So there's a lot of motivation. And it's like a safety net now and there's a community now which I really never had before. I have friends outside my own department, [laughter in voice] which is a big thing... because [pause] your friends are basically the people who sit in the lecture with you and that's very superficial. (MMUF interview, 2007)

The sense of community that Margaret experiences within the MMUF fold provides her with a true sense of feeling at home, where she 'has a space' (Wheeler 2013). She is able to develop a sense of

trust in others and in herself, which enables her to view her location and mission in the world beyond the confines of her MCB lectures and 'home Margaret'. The earlier rejection of her Black status had made her bitter and angry, leaving her with an overwhelming feeling of loss of faith in humanity. Her MMUF relationships on the other hand develop to such an extent that it allows her to rebuild a sense of hope and trust in others, and this makes her receptive to other possibilities for the realisation of self. The value she attaches to the MMUF relationships is borne out of a sense of personal investment and commitment, which is reciprocated by others in the relationship, forming a basis for the negotiation of self-identity and ontological security. This resonates with Giddens' (1991) notion of 'personal relationships' which opens up the possibility of experiencing intimacy. Here Margaret is 'able more positively to grasp the new opportunities which open up as pre-established modes of behavior become foreclosed' (Giddens 1991:13). She says of her relationship with her MMUF peers:

These people, actually they're committed to being, becoming an academic as well... and so there's a nice support system here. That's what the MMUF created, it's important. Like when I was writing deferred exams I saw Rosy everyday; [laughter in voice] she was my rescue squad, honestly. And when I phoned her up and I was crying this one time, she said, 'no, I'm coming from home, we're going to talk,' and all that. Whereas usually I would have just gone home, there would have been nobody to talk to... it was so important for me to maintain relationships that I made... and it's just like in that sense you know you're not going to go through it by yourself... it's just, like, the journey. (Margaret interview, 2007)

The consequences of the decision to apply for the MMUF scholarship at a time in her life when her sense of self and location was severely ruptured are such that it provides her with a transformed sense of mission in the world. The adoption of the MMUF identity not only adds a new dimension to Margaret's life, it transforms all other aspects of her life as well. It is an identity that she is proud of and excited about. It offers her a sense of visibility and mobility that she did not have before; a developed sense of awareness that extends beyond the confines of race. In Travisano's (1970) terms she would be viewed as one who had undergone a conversion process. In this sense her entry into the MMUF programme initiates another 'fateful moment' in her life, the core of which resides in the nature of the relationships she forms, as illustrated in the extract above. She describes the MMUF aspect of her identity as follows:

'MMUF Margaret', she's like, she'll just go in there and she'll do anything – well, not anything, anything [laughter in voice] within reason. But it's like she's much more freer and she knows that she's interacting with these people – yes, I met them by chance and if it wasn't for MMUF I would never [have] known any of them – but we're keeping up these relations out of choice, not out of obligation to you or Kathy, but really obligations to

ourselves and to each other because we made this unspoken... thing that we're going to keep in contact with each other, even if it's just like a SMS during the day.

(Margaret interview, 2007)

Margaret, by adopting and internalising the MMUF identity in this manner, is now able to enact, as was indicated by the reference to Mead (1934) above, the 'I' portion of the self 'that responds freely, creatively, and spontaneously'. In this way she discovers a new and resolute 'mine-self' and learns new things about herself and her capabilities. Her experience over four weeks of the USA Summer Institute at Emory University in Atlanta, clearly illustrates the extent of the freedom she feels within her own body, where the performative aspects of her identity are in unison with the construction of her biographical self:

It was like – I wore my hair down, I never did that! There's so many people with gaps in their teeth there... every second person had like a bigger gap than I did. And there's no such thing as crisp hair... so I let my hair down. If this was Cape Town I would so not have done that... Because it just – it attracts attention that you don't want... I felt liberated. I could do whatever I wanted... For once I wasn't Coloured with a 'u'. (Margaret interview, 2007)

## **Celebrating authenticity: Comparing the USA MMUF Summer Institute and the Mardi Gras**

In light of Margaret's euphoric experience it becomes important to acknowledge the extent to which the USA MMUF Summer Institute creates a unique context in which MMUF students are enabled to express and experiment with different forms of self-identity. The sense of common purpose shared amongst the American and South African MMUF fellows, the space provided to interrogate and reflect on race and identity politics within academia, the emphasis placed on developing collegiality and taking ownership of one's life choices, the affirmation of self-expression and the recognition of individual difference all combine in making the USA MMUF Summer Institute a dynamic and robust structure. With a strong mentoring philosophy underpinning various layers of supportive MMUF networks, the USA Summer Institute exemplifies a safe space in which to explore different possibilities of being. Within this space away from the confines of home, Margaret feels completely at ease and is able to comfortably express herself in ways that she would not have thought possible. Her feelings of freedom, spontaneity and joviality can perhaps be compared with the types of identity transformations undergone by Mardi Gras participants.

Kates' (2010) analysis of the *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras* is a case in point. By drawing on Turner (1982), Kates (2010:5) notes that those festivals such as the Mardi Gras "create 'liminal

spaces' that transform relationships among individuals... if only for a day". There is a strong overlap here with Bowers' (cited in Mezirow 1991) concept of 'liminal spaces' in that there is an element of possible transformation of the self that is presented. Unpacking the deeper meaning behind the *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*, Kates (2010) asserts that these types of festivals can 'be considered contested ground for countervailing meanings'. He goes on to say that 'On this day, the figure of the dark deviant homosexual other is celebrated and its virtues extolled' (Kates 2010:11). What stands out in this analysis is the acknowledgement and also the celebration of the 'other,' that which in normal everyday life is marginalised and frowned upon. In this way the Mardi Gras creates a safe space in which the 'other' can be paraded and presented in its raw, uninhibited and essential form. It is here that boundaries of the self are renegotiated and relationships and affiliations with like-minded others are reinforced. In this sense Kates (2010) argues that the Mardi Gras has the 'potential effect of self-transformation'.

This framing of the USA Summer Institute as a type of Mardi Gras structure, conjures up elements of agency, mobility and critical reflexivity which allows MMUF students' the opportunity to interrogate and even embrace the transformative nature of the underlining philosophy of the Summer programme. As a specific entity of an equity development programme, the MMUF Summer Institute inverts the minority, undervalued and subordinate status that its participants experience on a normal, everyday basis. Those traits that render students such as Margaret as 'other' in their everyday home environments come to be viewed as normal within the Summer Institute. The USA MMUF Summer Institute constitutes a space away from home; a space that plays by a different set of rules to that of the outside world; a space that acts as a protective buffer from the harshness of reality, where the risks and anxieties associated with 'being me' and 'feeling comfortable with who and what I am', are minimised and put on hold.

Margaret's *letting down of her hair* can be seen in Issachar's case as well, during his micro-teaching presentation<sup>3</sup> at the USA Summer Institute. As an introduction to his presentation, Issachar came dressed as a participant in the *Cape Town Minstrels Carnival*<sup>4</sup>. The carnival occurs on the second day

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<sup>3</sup> All MMUF fellows at the Summer Institute have to do a ten minute presentation based on their research, to give them a feel for what academic teaching practice entails. This session is followed by a five minute critique from their MMUF peers. Each student receives a video-recorded copy of their presentation to share with their mentors.

<sup>4</sup> The Minstrels are comprised of various Coloured troupes who together constitute what is more popularly referred to as the 'Coon Carnival' or 'Klopse' [in Afrikaans] by Coloured people on the Cape Flats. Carnival participants wear very bright, flashy costumes (representing the colours of their respective troupes), paint their faces and perform tricks,

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of January each year, exclusively in Cape Town, and presents itself as a uniquely Coloured (mostly working class) practice, in which various Minstrel troupes compete against each other for various accolades. Issachar's research was based on unpacking the social dynamics of the Cape Minstrels, and his performance during his presentation rendered a sense of authenticity and realness to his research. Thus, for his American audience, he was able to convey a particular aspect of Coloured working class identity, without the fear of being othered. Like Margaret's new found freedom for expressing herself, Issachar too felt free to display an affinity, through the costume, with those working class masses who were glaringly absent within academia.

In this respect some interesting links can be made with Gaudet's (1998) analysis which looks at how patients and staff housed at the National Hansen's Disease (leprosy) Centre in Carville, Louisiana, celebrate the Carville Mardi Gras by using it as an opportunity *not* to be recognised as different. Those suffering from Hansen's disease bear the socio-historical brunt of being regarded as the extreme other. Unlike in traditional Mardi Gras fashion where deviancy is the accepted order of the day's proceedings, these patients, who by virtue of their illness already possess a 'stigmatized' and 'deviant' social status, opt to "take on 'normal' (in terms of Mardi Gras) roles" (Gaudet 1998:23-24). In a metaphorical sense, the ritualised Mardi Gras context itself acts as a mask of 'anonymity' (de Caro 2011) allowing participants the limited freedom and security of mocking and acting beyond those everyday norms and values on the outside which restrict and marginalise their true sense of self. It is therefore within this process of creating a sense of normality that 'the freedom... to create a new identity' (Lindahl and Ware 1997 in de Caro 2011) also becomes a possibility.

Located and interpreted in this way, the MMUF USA Summer Institute, like the Mardi Gras, can also be construed as "a 'subjunctive' event in that it vividly and imagistically proposes alternative perspectives and hypothetical ways of thinking about the phenomenally experienced world" (Kates 2010:17). It is important to note here that while Mardi Gras participants have to return to normality at the end of this event, for the MMUF students there is a much better chance of them being able to maintain and sustain their new identities. The consequences of Margaret's 'fateful moment' is therefore epitomised by the nature of her growing interactions and experiences with the various layers which make up the MMUF Programme, beginning with her induction into the programme when she meets her UCT MMUF peers for the first time; the weekend orientation session when she measures the expectations of the programme against what she thinks she is able to offer; followed

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dance, play music and sing. Historically the carnival has its origins in Cape slavery, when slaves were given time off and allowed to celebrate on the second day of the New Year. Slaves would paint their faces to protect their anonymity.



by the USA Summer Institute where she realises that she is more than capable of rising to the MMUF challenge, and in the process discovers aspects of herself that add value, meaning and purpose to her life that reinforce a sense of investment in herself and the world. In short, she discovers her authenticity, and from this vantage point she can interact with the world with confidence and a sense of anticipation. Her renewed sense of 'mine-self' no longer hinges on others acceptance of her desire to be recognised as Black, nor on the shame that she associates with being classified as 'Coloured'. Instead it is epitomised by feelings of self-worth, intimacy and connectedness to life through her relationships with her Mellon peers. In Issachar's and Margaret's case, and as will be shown in Glenn's case as well, the creation of a new sense of authenticity is crucially anchored by a strong sense of having a supporting community. Without a supporting community, authenticity would be difficult to achieve. Through her 'fateful moment' episodes Margaret has therefore renegotiated her understanding of being Black as that which extends beyond the confines of race into a state of 'Being-in-the-world' (Wheeler 2013). In Giddens terms she has successfully managed to combine cognitive frameworks of reference with the appropriate levels of 'emotional commitment' which affords her the protection of an '*emotional inoculation*' (italics Giddens) against the threat of 'existential anxieties' (Giddens 1991).

### **Informing the fateful moment debate**

Margaret's 'fateful moment' experience occurs within the context of high anticipation and excitement around entering university and pronouncing her status as a Black, and not Coloured, South African. The rejection of this claim induces a dead space of social and personal detachment in which there is very little effort to reconcile the left-over fragments of her sense of self. Unlike Issachar, whom we have seen as someone who was constantly searching for an 'authentic self' (Issachar Interview, 2007), Margaret knew exactly who she was and who she wanted to be. It is within this state of *knowing* and of wanting to actualise what she perceived to be an 'authentic self' – a self which 'is mine... owned by me' (Wheeler 2013:np) – in an environment thought to be receptive of such a display of individuality and self-identification, that her 'fateful moment' occurs. Unlike Issachar's 'fateful moment' through which he discovers an authentic self, a meaningful way of 'Being-in-the-world' (Wheeler 2013) which is grounded and which directs purpose and mission in his life, Margaret's 'fateful moment' upon entering UCT does the exact opposite; it takes away her sense of identity and devastates the continuity and coherence of her biographical narrative of self.

At this stage, as indicated at the start of this chapter, Margaret's sense of location and security in the world centres around a perceived but as yet underdeveloped 'mine-self' borne out of pursuing and fighting for her own personal life choices throughout her childhood. It was her decision to adopt black consciousness, and her parents for the most part, supported her choices. But her continuing unease and struggle with her Black versus Coloured identity status reveals unresolved issues on her part, making her protective cocoon quite fragile upon entering UCT. The rejection of her claim to a Black identity therefore breaks through the fragility of the cocoon, and casts her vulnerable sense of self into a state of emotional and psychological turmoil. She is at this stage unable to account for and to mobilise her black consciousness identity into a state of resoluteness that will allow her to fend off insecurities so as to maintain a sense of continuity of self. So while Issachar's 'fateful moment' allows him to rewrite his biographical narrative from the perspective of having achieved an authentic sense of self, Margaret, after her 'fateful moment' upon entering UCT, rewrites hers from the perspective of having lost a sense of self. The nature of her anxiety takes the form of 'the struggle of being against non-being' (Kierkegaard 1944 cited in Giddens 1919:48). Within this state of self loss, she also experiences a sense of emotional numbness in her relationships with others in her world, and it is this state of numbness that severely impacts her sense of ontological security as she merely goes through the motions of everyday routines. In Heidegger's terms, given Margaret's disconnected state, she simply takes on the prescriptive 'Being of everydayness' established by the 'they self' in those contexts that she operates in (Heidegger 1927 cited in Wheeler 2013). Margaret seems to resemble what Heidegger refers to as "the fallen self, the self lost to the 'they'", which results in an 'inauthentic Dasein' who is reluctant to take ownership and responsibility for her life (Wheeler 2013:np).

This inauthentic self is the one that goes through the motions of applying for the Mellon scholarship, and who anxiously debates the merits of whether or not it will be able to live up to the challenges and responsibilities of being a MMUF fellow. The risk Margaret takes in staying on the programme results in another 'fateful moment': this one grants her a new lease on life. It creates a space for developing meaningful, intimate and trustworthy social relations outside of her discipline. It also provides opportunities for critical self-reflection and freedom to explore other possibilities of being, from which she consciously selects a particular way of existing in the world. The reciprocal nature of the trust that Margaret develops in her relationships with her UCT MMUF fellows allows her to reach a state of 'self-actualisation' through which she is able to experience a secure world

and a 'coherent sense of self-identity' (Giddens 1991). She states as part of her most recent reflections on this period of her life that:

I used to 'code-switch' between 'Black' and 'Coloured' at UCT a bit, and this made me feel like a bit of a fraud. Now I realise it is ok to code-switch, it doesn't mean one is any less authentic. I also think that code-switching, especially for people of colour... is necessary and can be constructive with respect to... acknowledging one's identity.

(Personal e-mail correspondence with Margaret, February 2014)

She has therefore found an answer to the question: 'Who am I?' and is able to experience a feeling of true authenticity in her life. With her 'mine-self' securely intact now, she can purposefully go 'about finding a different way of relating to others such that one is not lost to the they-self' Wheeler's (2013). This sense of being is depicted in her feedback to me when she was afforded an opportunity to comment on my analysis of her life story. Writing from within a European context where she is now pursuing her PhD she states quite emphatically:

I am less anxious about forming meaningful relationships... I am in a new environment now and I am taking it in my stride... I don't assess my self-worth by the number or type of relationships I have any more - at least not as much... I am older and have had more life experience. I care a lot less about how others define me and am much more self-assured in my own abilities... I am also less defensive about my interests... As I have found people, from various backgrounds, to share them with.

(Personal e-mail correspondence with Margaret, February 2014)

Margaret's story teaches us that 'fateful moment' episodes can debilitate, disorientate, reduce and nullify the meaning of one's existence in the world. Unlike in Issachar's case where a 'fateful moment' was able to unite the fragments of self, for Margaret a 'fateful moment' is the very mechanism that creates the dilemma of a fragmented sense of self. At the same time 'fateful moments' such as Margaret's also offer a basis for comparison in terms of measuring unfulfilled and dashed hopes against new possibilities for growth that emerge. These comparisons of 'fateful moments' provide us with a sense of the boundaries that others and we ourselves place on our self-perceptions and locations within the world. It helps us to examine, upon reflection, our experiences of those boundaries of selfhood that hinder self-realisation and it does this by forcing us, even unwittingly, to seek new possibilities for understanding and locating ourselves in the world. The self-reflexive engagement forming part of the above process is what enables Margaret, through a 'fateful moment' experience, to reconceptualise her black consciousness identity in terms of being Colored, without the 'u'.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **Glenn's story: Confessions of a transformed Coloured 'snob' who moved from being proudly and exclusively 'brown' to wanting to be a 'Black professor'**

Glenn's feeling of 'Being-in-the-world' is associated with the strong sense of family pride derived from the acknowledgement of the European strands of their Coloured identity. Traditional perceptions of European culture are something his family aspires to, especially in terms of intellectual pursuits, cultural refinement and individual prowess. The values Glenn associates with his White European ancestry is therefore a guiding force in his life. He also uses his ancestry as a means of distinguishing himself from other working class Coloureds who do not share these traits, and more importantly, for distancing himself from the label of being called 'Black'. Blacks, in this sense, are viewed as the extreme 'other', and tend to lack all those elements that Glenn aspires to and values. He therefore professes to be proudly Coloured because of his European ancestry, and vehemently defends this position within a higher educational context of rapid change in which the imposed label of Colouredness is being rejected in favour of Blackness.

In this chapter, I draw on Glenn's narration of his 'fateful moment', in order to elaborate on the increasing pressure being placed on Coloured identity in SA, particular the type of Coloured identity that insists on holding on to a state of relative privilege in our new democracy. I follow Glenn's entry into the MMUF programme and show how this signals a very real confrontation between the Coloured nature of his 'Being' and the strong sense of Black empowerment that he encounters amongst his MMUF peers. I foreground how his 'fateful moment' draws him to a sober awakening of his own fallibility, and show how this realisation brings about a transformation in the way in which he values and embeds himself in the world, within a context of social justice and redress. Elements of reconciliation and redress are a strong underlying feature of this analysis. In keeping with the qualitative case study methodological process employed in the previous two case studies, I continue to draw extensively on interview data here, so as to grant the narration of Glenn's biography (as was the case with Issachar and Margaret), an element of authenticity and presence in the unfolding analysis. Glenn is extremely outspoken about those things that he values

in his life, and that which he abhors. He has a tendency to speak his mind and starts off his MMUF journey by paying little attention to how this impacts those around him. Glenn's strong presence comes across quite vividly in the way in which he tells his story, and I have used larger interview extracts in this chapter as a means of conveying the changing nature of this presence to the reader.

### A fateful moment in the life of Glenn:

#### Episode 1:

And one of the things which I will never forget, it was so profound... at Emory University, it was the second last day when they have the banquet – and Dr. Spence stood up there and she said 'I just want you all to remember how privileged you are, that you guys are here as a result of privileges which others have never had – and never think of yourself as being better than anybody else'. And that was like – what! Because I had always thought of myself as better than other people. And it just struck me and really hit home, and ever since, I mean, I've never said to anyone but I'm saying it to you... it was... profound, influenced me to think for myself. If I reflect back on the past 21 years of my life, I can attribute absolutely everything to privileges because something could have gone so badly wrong that I would be in a totally different place than I am right now.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

#### Episode 2:

But then we had the January conference in the beginning of this year which was all the coordinators of the various campuses – and I attended that, I attended almost everything – and I think that's what sparked it off for me was sitting in on seminars where you've got faculty of various universities arguing with one another about what transformation is [and why it is] necessary. And I think especially the actual topic of the conference, which was *excellence and equity*, which I had never come across before – and then there was this book published on that I think as well, so I had started reading the book. It just became very interesting and I thought, okay, this is actually worth looking into. I read the book... and I just thought *this* is for me; *this* is what I'm supposed to do as well! And I didn't understand the American context when I was there at Emory the year before because you kept hearing about... things were not moving forward in America... And when I heard the various faculty discussing how things were going down with their own universities – that's when I realised, okay, this is actually a worthwhile course... And that's how I definitely thought this scholarship, it's perfect that I got into it – and I so strongly believe in it, and the motivation behind this concept of moving towards change in the academy and transformation... I started realising that – I just became more aware of humanity around me which was never part of me before. I started looking around at basically everything and looking at it as part of the humanist perspective.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

Glenn's 'fateful moment' outlined above, is framed by two separate but significant interlinking episodes which culminate in a radical reassessment of his personal value system and the nature of how he views his purpose in the world. The first episode forces him to reflect very significantly on the nature of the privileges that informed the trajectory of his life, and opens up an element of

self-awareness that he had not possessed before. The second episode alerts him to the type of social impact that this type of awareness can make in addressing inequity in the academic arena. Together these two 'fateful moment' episodes provide Glenn with a sense of necessity and purpose in life that is radically different to that which he had upon his entry into the MMUF programme. This radical transformation of his sense of self-awareness takes place fully within the confines of the MMUF programme, and in this respect he differs from Issachar and Margaret. Unlike Margaret, who before entering the MMUF programme had lost a sense of self through having her Black identity rejected, and a Coloured identity imposed on her, Glenn enters MMUF with quite a strong feeling of superiority and snobbery, secure in the knowledge that his individual worth as a Coloured carried more value than that of his MMUF peers. In this manner his entry into the MMUF programme is more reminiscent of Issachar's confidence when he first became an MMUF fellow. But unlike Issachar's strong sense of authenticity, Glenn's perceived sense of superiority reveals a state of immaturity and incompleteness of self that derives from strong maternal influences in his life which have shaped his life choices, attitudes, and sense of location and security in the world. The nature of these maternal influences provides the backbone to Glenn's narration of his identity, an identity derived from a strong sense of 'they-self' (Wheeler 2013). Unpacking the impact of these maternal influences also provides us with some insight into the increasing fragility that begins to descend on Glenn's protective cocoon. Furthermore, it gives us a sense of why the changes of self that Glenn undergoes within the MMUF programme can be classified as drastic and transformative when analysed through Giddens' (1991) existentialist lens.

### **A life framed by music and snobbery: The art of being intelligent, 'brown' and proud**

Glenn's mother and grandmother formed the cornerstone of his interest in academia and his passion for studying music. Under their influence, he developed a strong sense of his presence in the world. He provides quite a vivid description of his admiration for these women:

The first one was my maternal grandmother whom I grew up with... she was a piano teacher ... I don't think I would have gotten into music if it wasn't for her, and my life, I keep using the term or the phrase 'my life is framed by music' because that is what I am about... she was such a strict and stern woman... I believe that she's sort of been an inspiration all the time to me... I've got a picture of her up in my room... even though she's been dead for ten years at least... I see her as a guiding force, guiding everything that I do... And then I think my mother as well... even when I was growing up I still saw her studying constantly – and I knew that I wanted to do that as well – I was just inspired by that enthusiasm for education – and that was very influential... because I also knew... I

always knew I wanted to be an academic. I always knew I was interested in work and studying and learning... I always have had a strong personality – because I was like that in my primary school... And when I came to varsity I knew varsity years were mine for the taking... they are also without a doubt the best years of my life – no regrets.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

This strong maternal influence in Glenn's life has also provided him with a distinct sense of racial identity within the post-apartheid South African setting, one which contradicts the manner in which both Issachar and Margaret have identified themselves. Glenn's sense of location in the world, his value system, his racial and class-based prejudices (which I will elaborate on later), his strong individualistic streak and his inflated sense of self-importance are therefore all located in the nature of his upbringing. The security of his protective cocoon thus emanates from the strong sense of 'they-self' which it houses. Glenn's parents were divorced when he was still very young, which made the maternal presence in his life all the more telling. He arrives at UCT with a strong sense of mission. His high academic achievements and his sense of determination and perseverance are amongst the qualities that initially make him an attractive candidate for the MMUF award. Upon entering the MMUF space Glenn is thus very assured about his abilities and his confidence in expressing himself:

I was the top music student at Pinelands High School and I knew that I was good, and nobody could fault me on that... I don't get nervous... for me it's such a waste. Why must you get anxious about something or even fret about something? *Sê jou ding en klaar* (state your point and be done with it), you know what I mean.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

What can be deduced from the above extract is a sense of Glenn's inflated ego and his need to be, or at least to *feel* in control of the circumstances he finds himself in. Through this sense of control he is able to project his 'active mastery' (Giddens 1991) over perceived threatening situations. Giddens (1991:194) views such behaviour as a defence mechanism of the self, and identifies such individuals as those whose ontological security is often derived from a 'fantasy of dominance' in which they feel in supreme control of events. Giddens (1991) goes on to assert that this form of defence of the self can be 'brittle' and could easily become vulnerable to engulfment.

On further examination of Glenn's case, it is evident that the type of confidence he displays is also accompanied by a self-confessed type of elitism when it came to 'mixing' with other people whom he regarded as being socially inferior. He states quite emphatically, 'from a young age I was a bit of a snob – and I just thought, oh, gosh, and I couldn't mix'. This tendency to view himself in a particular light and as being different to other students, endured right up to the point when he

received notification of the MMUF scholarships, and decided to apply. He states of this experience:

Even when I got the application for the MMUF, it said 'are for *Black* students' [laughter in voice]. And I shoved it aside and I thought this is not for me. You know what I mean. I never even considered that, okay... 'Black' would include Coloured people.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

### **Race and Identity at the Atlanta Summer Institute: Defying Coloured stereotypes and Black assimilation**

During the initial stages of his MMUF scholarship Glenn has not yet begun to process the core themes of change and transformation underlining the MMUF programme, and is attracted to others on the programme that he identifies as having similar values and perspectives to his own. This is evident at the MMUF Summer Institute at Emory University in Atlanta, when he befriends one Latino and two White American MMUF fellows<sup>1</sup> and distances himself from the African-American majority. The reason he provides for identifying more with the Latino and White MMUF students are as follows:

The Summer Institute had a lot of Black American students and they had this afro pride which I never had – and I just thought how weird is that [laughter in voice] that I'm actually coming from the continent and I don't have that... I was always on the defensive there, you know. And I think, but what made it better for me was that there were some... Latin American students, who also tried to distance themselves from the label 'African American' - and also were a bit snobbish, you know... and they latched onto the South African group because a lot of us were not 'authentically Black', you see... the [African] American students initially couldn't understand why these mixed race students and 'White' students were also included in our cohort.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

This particular extract is very telling; it reveals a friendship based on Glenn's assumption of 'snobbish' behaviour and shared common values on the Latino students' part, and also exposes his angst concerning some of the labelling practices that were happening at the institute, particularly those concerning race and identity. In this instance Glenn conflates the use of the 'African American' label in the American context with the use of the term 'Black' as a uniform designation for people of colour in SA, a practice he wished to distance himself from quite emphatically and in a public forum. Unlike Margaret, Glenn maintained strongly that he was not Black, but Coloured. The distinction is linked to his perception of Blacks and their academic abilities, particularly within the context of UCT's music college:

<sup>1</sup> Although the MMUF scholarships are limited to Black students in SA, in the USA context White students who demonstrate a commitment to transformation are also accepted onto the programme.



I had this thing also of 'Black' students, they're such weak students, you know what I mean. Yes. They are such weak students and we don't need them to bring down our standard. (Glenn interview, 2006)

The debate about how Glenn chose to identify – in racial terms – at the Summer Institute is therefore important for understanding the nature of his ontological security and sense of self before undergoing his 'fateful moment' episodes. The importance which Glenn attributed to his racial stance at the Summer Institute can easily be gleaned from the elaborate explanations he offered on the subject during his interviews with me. The following two extracts provide some significant insights into Glenn's conceptualising and internalising of his Coloured identity status (extract 1), which sets up a conflict situation between him and a fellow South African MMUF student, Selwyn,<sup>2</sup> at the Atlanta Summer Institute at Emory University. The source of contention was that Selwyn, like Margaret, is classified as 'Coloured', but chose to identify as a Black South African (extract 2):

Extract 1:

I was more European... And I identified more with that side of my heritage... I was proud of my European heritage. And I don't know if that came as a result of the family that I grew up in because I'd always seen that in my parents. My grandfather on my dad's side was a German man... so my dad was like '*ek is half wit*' (I am half White), you know what I mean! And he's like 'Your grandfather was a pure blood German'. And on my grandmother and mother's side it was also all Portuguese heritage and English heritage – and they were all very proud of that and it was a nice thing to be fair [skinned]. And I – not necessarily that it was right but I grew up around that atmosphere and it had a vast impact on me where everybody would always compliment my mother because she was the fairest out of them all. And she liked it such a lot and she sort of, you know, exploited that. And I was, I'm a bit more fair than what my brother is and that just made me feel a bit - so I've always identified with the European and British more. They never spoke about the African heritage... I knew I obviously had Black heritage – and they would also maintain that this is my family, that it's not Black. It's not Black, it's brown. It's White and brown which is being mixed... and I just adopted that stance... and that was indoctrinated into my mind. And when I went over to America I thought – that was still how I thought of myself – I didn't think of myself as a Black African person. I knew I was born in South Africa, there was nothing I could do to change that – but that was as far as it went – I was born in South Africa to mixed race ancestors, um, and... didn't necessarily define myself as a Black African... we were classified as Coloured, you may not necessarily have liked it but... it just became a part of I think – most Coloured people's identity was to adopt it and a lot of them turned it around, instead of it being a negative thing it became a positive thing – they would say, 'yes, we're proudly Coloured'. And I saw that in my family as well.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

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<sup>2</sup> I introduced Selwyn earlier, in chapter 3, as a member of Glenn's UCT MMUF cohort.

## Extract 2:

It must have been within the first two days at Emory... Emory students... started asking us questions. And then I think Selwyn's point of saying – oh, as a Coloured person, he doesn't see himself as actually a Coloured person, he sees himself as a 'Black African'. And I said 'Don't call me Black, please!' – and that stems from what I said earlier because I didn't see myself as Black. And for me... this is just my thoughts, as wrong as it may be... for me Black meant authentic 'Black', 'tribal Black', 'Black' which is not being diluted, if you can say that, you know... so it's always just been 'pure Black' ancestry – that's what Black meant to me. And I thought I didn't have that, I've actually got more European ancestry than what I do have African. So that sort of made me differ significantly with Selwyn.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

Glenn did not only wish to distinguish himself from the use of the term 'Black' which was used as a blanket designation for people of colour in SA, but also from specific groups of Coloureds, with whom he felt he had very little in common, particularly in terms of class and ideological perspectives. This 'othering' of specific groups of Coloureds is also revealed as part of the aforementioned debate at the Summer Institute with his South African MMUF fellow, Selwyn, about what it meant to be Coloured. The following extract reveals more about this debate:

And he (Selwyn) put forth this stereotype to the Americans that Coloured people are associated with the flower sellers in Adderley Street and the fisherman – and ... who are... teachers and are nurses, and your typical Coloured person is your factory worker. And I didn't like that at all. I said 'I do not want to be boxed into that stereotype because I don't see myself as that. Yes, some of my family members may fall into that stereotype but I don't view myself'... I said 'I could never see myself be associated with flower sellers and fishermen and factory workers'. My dad's been a factory worker, he's running [laughter in voice] 40 years work service – and he loves it, he wouldn't change it for the world. He says that he's not interested that he didn't pursue a matric [Grade 12] when he had the opportunity because he's so happy with what he does. If that works for him, great! I don't understand it but... And I always said a lot when I was in Atlanta. I am a snob and I look down on my own people – I think why can't we better ourselves? Why do we have to be associated with these stereotypes which Selwyn was putting... Why do we need to be associated with gangsters in our communities? You know all these negative things. And I felt that I had to constantly defend my stance.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

As can be seen from the above extract, Glenn's views about Coloured stereotypes extend to his immediate family, such as in the case of his father, whose actions and perspectives on life are deemed by Glenn to be out of place. This is also quite telling about what Glenn aspires to and how he wishes to be viewed by the world. He has very set ideas about the types of behaviour that are socially acceptable and appropriate, and appears overly defensive about any misconceptions that others may have of him. This reveals the rigidity and immaturity of his sense of self at this stage. There are also hints here perhaps of the type of lifestyle that Glenn wishes to be associated with. In extreme cases such public displays of the symbols that define how one wants to be viewed by

the world can lead to instances of identity commodification, whereby one's 'appearance' becomes 'the prime arbiter of value' (Giddens 1991:200). This superficial sense of self-worth is further indication of Glenn's immaturity and lack of authenticity. The external image Glenn presents to the world is therefore one through which he hopes to convey a strong sense of individual worth, self-pride and sophistication, as conveyed in the following three extracts:

Extract 1: Here, Glenn critiques the American MMUF students' supposed preconceived notions of what the South African MMUF students would look like and how they would present themselves at the institute:

I remember when Selwyn, myself and the other students walked in – I'll never forget. We entered the house at Emory. They were all sitting in a circle waiting for the UCT people to arrive. And myself and Selwyn walked in and we looked very presentable, [laughter in voice] we both [wore] blazer jackets. And I remember one of them or a couple of students said 'Oh, you guys dress quite smartly'. And I just thought, 'Oh, well, what were you expecting?' It was a sort of funny thing – I just thought, 'now I wonder what you *were* expecting if you say you guys are dressed quite smartly?'

(Glenn interview, 2006)

Here, Glenn presents his annoyance about being judged on preconceived assumptions about people of colour in SA. There is an element of pride which Glenn attaches to his attire and the manner in which he presents himself in public. Drawing on Goffmann's (1971) analysis Giddens emphasises the important role that 'routine control of the body' plays in promoting 'agency and... being accepted (trusted) by others as competent' (Giddens 1991:57). By wearing a 'blazer jacket', Glenn was signaling that his attire was in line with the protocols associated with the occasion, namely, the formal introduction between the American and South African MMUF students. Through his dress code Glenn is able to enact a particular 'demeanour... in relation to constitutive conventions' for the occasion at hand (Giddens 1991:99). This continuity that he creates between external appearances and the construction of a biographical narrative of self allows him to have a sense of ontological security. This line of reasoning is continued in the next two extracts.

Extract 2: Glenn critiques Selwyn's presentation at the South African roundtable session at the Summer Institute, where each of the South African MMUF fellows was afforded the opportunity to reflect on their intellectual journeys. Selwyn read one of his own poems as an introduction to his talk. His poem is in Afrikaans and is entitled *Vok Verwoed* (*Fuck Verwoed*), in reference to the National Party's Afrikaner leader deemed to be the architect of institutionalised apartheid in SA. His poem offers a scathing attack on the system of apartheid. It is the tone of the poem;

exaggerated by the use of Afrikaans (especially since profanities are best expressed through the use of Afrikaans for a really guttural effect) that really makes Glenn uncomfortable during the formal roundtable session. Glenn finds the poem to be out of place and frowns upon Selwyn's use of this poem as a mechanism for unpacking his lived experiences on the Cape Flats. In this respect Selwyn's actions represents the 'other' type of Coloured, the type that Glenn does not want to be associated with. Glenn states:

I am such a rigid person, I will never read poetry as a part of a speech because I just feel that is, it's so common, do you know what I mean? It's so common and I just thought 'what an inappropriate poem to choose for the American students'. Well... to each his own.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

Extract 3: Here we are presented with Glenn's sense of etiquette, which he uses as a tool to separate himself from other family members:

It was so fascinating to me [the White characters in the foundation phase school readers] and I thought, ag, this is what I was supposed to do. I've been born into the wrong race! I've been born into the wrong family! And I grew up like that... even still today, I just can't take common things. I mean, I live with a family member who's like that – very basic – and she will drink out of a paper cup if she can. And it goes through me. I'm like – no, why is she... stooped down to that level?

(Glenn interview, 2006)

The array of extracts presented throughout this chapter, ranging from the core maternal influences in Glenn's life to his abhorrence of drinking out of paper cups, all mesh together to provide a particular type of orientation to the world. These narrative extracts provide a biographical representation of Glenn's life, a life steeped in family history and controversy associated with being classified as Coloured. This history of origins has, through quite an intense family socialisation process, given Glenn a strong sense of who and what he is, what he is not, and the types of behaviour that are appropriate in various settings. Glenn's choice of a particular type of lifestyle is apparent here. Adhering to the practices and values that are attached to these lifestyles are important, since they 'give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity' (Giddens 1991:81). The harmony between the performative aspects of identity and the narrative of self must be upheld to maintain ontological security (Giddens 1991). Through his lifestyle he can maintain a specific perspective of the world, a perspective which he can account for and which he utilises to maintain a strict sense of order by asserting ownership and responsibility for his life choices.

There is, however, also a lack of flexibility with respect to the perspectives Glenn adopts, which means that he closes himself off to any *other* possible perspectives about the world. Using Mezirow's (1991) insights here, Glenn is filtering out other perspectives that can potentially produce anxiety and impact the routine nature of his daily activities. In adopting this rigid stance, Glenn's production of information about the world becomes 'sedimented' (Corrie and Milton 2000), closing down opportunities for growth and development of the self. In terms of Giddens' (1991) analyses, Glenn's fixed perspective falls within the ambit of the unification versus fragmentation dilemma, where the self actively engages in preserving a particular type of self-identity amidst the multitude of possible identities that it is confronted with. Giddens argues that in instances where the self is unable to resolve the unification versus fragmentation dilemma, a specific type of pathology is evident in the form of a compulsively rigid person, who links his or her identity to 'a set of fixed commitments' with no adherence to elements of relativity. Giddens (1991) asserts that the sense of self in the above pathology is dependent on receiving acknowledgement from others, thereby depicting a weak state of ontological security. Glenn's preoccupation with exhibiting the correct and proper appearances and demeanour in the public realm so as to be deemed competent certainly falls within the scope of Giddens' dilemma outlined above.

Given the immense maternal impact on his primary socialisation, what Glenn displays upon entering the MMUF programme, particularly in his experience at the Summer Institute in Atlanta, is therefore the acting out of 'a set of fixed commitments', as alluded to earlier. In doing so he emphatically chooses to remain loyal to a particular type of 'they-self' Coloured identity upheld and reinforced by his immediate family. His state of 'Being' makes him openly antagonistic and overly defensive of a fragile sense of self that is still naive and heavily dependent on group sanctioning, particularly in relation to his Colouredness. He therefore clearly distinguishes *his* Coloured identity from the likes of his South African Coloured MMUF peers, Margaret, Selwyn and Issachar, all of whom subscribe to a black consciousness identity or are searching for some other means, beyond Colouredness (such as spirituality as in Issachar's case), to ground themselves in the world. In Glenn's case his Coloured identity during this phase of his life does not constitute an authentic self as yet. Instead, as has already been asserted, it conforms to a type of 'they-self' (Wheeler 2013) which he has inherited from his mother and grandmother, and which he has internalised, reproduced and applied without any self-critique in his dealings with others.

Glenn, at this beginning stage of his MMUF experience, therefore stands in stark contrast to Issachar's entry into MMUF, since Issachar had already attained a strong sense of authenticity through his spiritual awakening and reconceptualisation of Black and Coloured identity in SA. Glenn also differs with Margaret, in that her entry into the MMUF fold sees her having neither a strong sense of Coloured or Black identity, especially since her black consciousness and as yet under-developed 'mine-self', had already been shattered. Unlike Glenn, Margaret thus enters MMUF with mere fragments of her imposed Coloured identity, since this is all she has to hold on to for the construction of a biographical narrative of self.

### **The Atlanta Summer Institute: Breaking down the boundaries of racial prejudice to discover the 'other' within**

Despite Glenn's attempts to reinforce the protective cocoon housing his sense of self, his defensive engagements with his 'afro pride' (Glenn interview, 2006) MMUF peers at the Summer Institute, do begin to take its toll on him. I have discussed in Margaret's chapter the plausibility of viewing the Atlanta Summer Institute as an event that exhibits a type of Mardi Gras effect, in which 'liminal' spaces are created for acknowledging and celebrating the 'other' (Kates 2010). Within this context, Glenn finds that the cocoon surrounding his rigidly constructed sense of self-identity, exemplified by its distinctive non-Black status, becomes increasingly pressurised and threatened by the emphasis that the Atlanta Summer Institute places on the politicising, reconceptualising and empowering of Black identity within traditional, White middle-class university settings. The recognition and empowerment of the status of the Black intellectual is an important element of transformation that the MMUF Programme aims to bring about within academia. The unfolding confrontation between MMUF's ideological imperative and Glenn's claim of being Coloured *and not* Black, therefore sets the scene for his 'fateful moment' encounter in which his protective cocoon is broken through, rendering a vulnerable and underdeveloped self.

Glenn reacts quite early to the theme of transformation and empowerment of Black intellectualism at the institute, and his sentiment regarding this is captured by the following statement: 'I just thought: why are they keeping on... about transforming the academy and diversity. It just became a bit irritating after a while' (Glenn interview, 2006). These feelings of irritation that are beginning to surface are very telling, especially since Glenn is confronted for the first time with high achieving African-American students who are amongst the top students at their respective US institutions. In terms of Giddens' (1991) analysis, Glenn finds himself in a

climate of risk in which the protective cocoon that surrounds his sense of self and which enables the routine nature of his location in the world is beginning to feel threatened. Giddens' (1991) recognition of the 'unification versus fragmentation' dilemma of the self is once again apparent here as Glenn struggles to preserve a unified sense of self in the face of Black academic achievement. The rigidity associated with his 'set of fixed commitments' to issues of race, class and intellect, makes him view Black academic achievement as an anomaly. In terms of Mezirow's (1990) analysis, Glenn's schematic knowledge, shown above as being formed and developed under the tutelage and strong influence of maternal figures during his childhood, comprises 'unconditional, core beliefs about [himself], others and the world.' As a protective measure for ontological security, these beliefs act as a filtering mechanism (Corrie and Milton 2000) for his Summer Institute experiences so as to reduce the element of risk that these experiences contain. However, the 'rigid and inflexible' beliefs (Strasser and Strasser 1997 cited in Corrie and Milton 2000) he holds about how he identifies and grounds himself in the world in terms of race and class, are identified here as the cause of his growing distress and anxiety at the Institute. The continued inability to reduce and block out the anxiety produced by intruding elements of risk, makes Glenn's protective cocoon increasingly frail and vulnerable to onslaught. Glenn enters into a state of crisis that resonates with Giddens' (1991) analysis of the fragility of the ontological state amongst those who find themselves in this 'unification versus fragmentation' dilemma.

As gleaned from his 'fateful moment' extract at the start of this chapter, it was Glenn's encounter with prominent Mellon administrators at the Summer Institute that sparks his initial phase of identity transformation. The first encounter is with the MMUF Programme Director, a high-ranking African-American female administrator who holds a PhD and who previously taught in a university setting. She visited the fellows at the Summer Institute to address them about the aims and mission of the MMUF programme, and to impress upon them the importance of their selection. This incident made quite an impact on Glenn. He recalls the MMUF Programme Director stating: 'We believe in your abilities to contribute to change.' Glenn recalls how her comments made him feel:

And that I think sort of... knocked me because this one senior person who is in charge of the scholarship, she's... a PhD and she's a person of colour, came to speak to us – and then I sort of... aspired to that. (Glenn interview, 2006)

Glenn's second encounter at the Summer Institute is with the Director of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). The UNCF administers MMUF scholarships at historically Black colleges and



universities (HBCU's) in the Atlanta region. The UNCF Director also holds a PhD and is an African-American female college professor and senior administrator, and is also an MMUF campus coordinator and faculty mentor. Like the MMUF Director above, she also carries quite a bit of clout amongst the MMUF Summer Institute fellows and MMUF faculty from HBCU's. As the senior and more experienced administrator, the MMUF Director has mentored and influenced her younger UNCF colleague in terms of her leadership positions within MMUF. Based on my interactions with these two individuals at a number of Summer Institutes and MMUF Coordinators Conferences over the years, I would describe them as extremely charismatic, possessing great oratory skills and able to conduct themselves with an air of authoritative sophistication. They certainly possessed the proficiency and ability to 'command reception' and the 'right to speak' (Pierce 1995) at MMUF gatherings. This is especially relevant for the Atlanta Summer Institute, where MMUF students are in the process of grappling with the possibility of becoming academics and what this would entail for their sense of self, purpose and location in the world. These students are suddenly confronted with the status, prestige and magnitude of the contributions to transformation made by these two formidable Black female figures. As was seen in the first 'fateful moment' extract cited at the start of this chapter, Glenn encounters the UNCF Director's full authoritative presence quite late in the institute. However, it made enough impact to fundamentally shift the way in which he thought about himself and the nature of his interactions with others. He finds himself engaging reflexively with his biographical narrative. He revisits key moments in his life, reinterpreting and re-evaluating those moments from the perspective of acknowledging how others have contributed towards his personal growth, development and achievements:

And it just struck me and really hit home, and ever since, I mean, I've never said to anyone but I'm saying it to you... it was ... profound, influenced me to think for myself. If I reflect back on the past 21 years of my life, I can attribute absolutely everything to privileges because something could have gone so badly wrong that I would be in a totally different place than I am right now. (Glenn interview, 2006)

There are certain elements which stand out about how the above encounters impact Glenn. Firstly, the two individual's concerned, in addition to being high ranking female officials within the MMUF fold, are both educators, strong willed, extremely confident and committed to their cause. Presented in this manner they bear strong resemblance to the maternal influences in Glenn's life. Secondly, like Glenn's grandmother and mother, who devote themselves to offering Glenn a stable home environment in which there is no father figure, the MMUF and UNCF Directors' also adopt nurturing roles which uphold and affirm the structure and mission of the MMUF programme.



Thirdly, these Directors also position themselves as mentors and role models for the MMUF fellows coming through the ranks of undergraduate study. So despite their high status, they make themselves accessible to new MMUF students, something that Glenn finds most intriguing. Glenn, given his upbringing, his strong sense of individuality and his drive to achieve academically, therefore seems naturally attracted to these women.

Besides the overlaps in terms of being attracted to the charm of powerful, strong women, there is another important factor to be considered here, namely that of skin colour, which, as evidenced earlier, plays quite an important role in Glenn's sense of self and location in the world.

In Glenn's worldview, his personal value system operates on the basis of skin colour and intelligence. This meant that he attributed a higher degree of authority and prominence to fair-skinned individuals' with high intellectual capacity. On the home front it was his grandmother and mother who fulfilled this role for him until such time that he was able to grace the steps of UCT's music college to be taught by White lecturers. He says of the image he had of UCT: 'It was always the White professor, the White old professor in front'. This type of race-based awareness grounds him. The significance of what he is confronted with in Atlanta in the form of the MMUF and UNCF Directors, who possess everything he aspires to in terms of intellect, position, class and sophistication, comes down to the fact that these credentials are owned by Black women. In coming to terms with this state of affairs, he finds the familiarity and security of the 'self-evident lifeworld' he knows, being confronted with a 'disorientating dilemma' (Mezirow 1991). The latter leads to a cross-road where he has to choose between adopting this new perspective of Black intellectual achievement and leadership into his existing worldview, or to discard it and leave things unchanged. Glenn's adoption of this new perspective means that he has to reconstruct 'unconditional, core beliefs about [himself], others and the world' (Mezirow 1990). In doing so he accepts a reformulated type of 'self evidence' so as to rebuild his damaged cocoon in order to achieve a sense of normality within his everyday routines (Mezirow 1991).

Another important observation can be made here, namely, that the representation of strong Black female intellectual leadership at the Atlanta Summer Institute, allows for an acknowledgement and acceptance of different possibilities of self, which in normal everyday contexts would have been difficult for Glenn to conceive of. Glenn, born and raised on the racially divisive Cape Flats, is so in tune with the status quo established and sanctioned by a minority and somewhat elitist 'they-self', that it takes a trip to a Summer Institute in America to realise the existence and value

inherent in other types of self. Here he finds strong Black female academic leaders Like the MMUF Director, a woman who holds the purse strings to the MMUF scholarships, and who is in a key position to support many of Glenn's higher education pursuits. He is confronted with a different kind of Black intellectual: the kind who does not need to shout out and flaunt credentials. Their power lies instead in the types of service they deliver in helping to empower a marginalised university community, a community that Glenn has denied being part of. This first phase of his 'fateful moment' experience at the Summer Institute helps him realise that one's power, sense of authenticity and belonging in the world does *not* have to be associated with skin colour. This drastic shift in perception is captured quite powerfully in Glenn's recounting of a discussion he had with the only Black (in terms of Glenn's understanding of the term) student in his UCT MMUF cohort at the Summer Institute. He finds himself in a situation where he is forced to confront his own racist beliefs:

I remember one case was where Ruth (a pseudonym) and I started a very long conversation and she said 'I'm a Black African but because I'm from Zimbabwe people would usually assume that I will be doing very poorly.' So, I mean, something just clicked there when she said that to me... and I just thought, I mean, I'd been making the same assumptions, I was thinking, 'well, these Black South Africans are worth nothing'. I mean, not to say worth nothing but -. It has to do with attitude... that they are just not up to the standard of which everybody else is. And when I looked at Ruth I just thought I see where I've been making mistakes... by just assuming things based on skin colour or race... The Institute changed the way I thought about race and labelling somebody based on their skin colour. And it also made me realise my beliefs were not always right.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

### **Beyond the Summer Institute: Grappling with an incomplete state of self-transformation**

Glenn's encounters with the MMUF and UNCF Directors, his confrontation with high academic achieving Black MMUF fellows, his interrogation of, and critical reflective engagement with his own set of assumptions about race, intellect and identity, sets in motion a process of transformation which only reaches fruition six months later, at the MMUF Faculty Coordinators Conference. The period leading up to Glenn's second 'fateful moment', therefore, offers the opportunity for further interrogation of the complexities associated with the construction of the protective cocoon, the act of reflexivity and the search for authenticity in the world.

Upon returning to UCT after the Summer Institute, Glenn has time to reflect on his experiences, but finds that the hype generated around the issue of transforming the academy begins to wane as he settles into his daily routines at UCT's College of Music. Despite not experiencing the sense of urgency and immediacy that he grew accustomed to during his month-long stay at the Summer Institute, there are residual elements linked to the changes that Glenn experienced, and these tend to burst through his protective cocoon and interrupt his daily routines at the music college. These intrusions unsettle his new and developing sense of self, and the intensity of his anxiety becomes amplified since the music college context is far removed from the support, affirmation and camaraderie found at the Atlanta Summer Institute. In fact, Glenn finds that his first phase of transformation has made him more fragile, vulnerable and unsure of himself than he was before the Summer Institute. The Glenn encountered here is, therefore, one who is still in the process of transitioning from one phase of identity to another, and these shifts which he encounters are indicative of artificial and inauthentic elements of self that he still needs to grapple with as he strives to reach a more robust and permanent core identity. This is in direct contrast to Glenn's presumptuous nature when he first came to UCT, which saw a naive but feisty, egotistical individual, who was out to impress White academic staff with his aptitude for learning and his ability to excel as a Coloured music student. This contrast can be seen in the following extracts. The first extract shows Glenn's state of mind when he started at UCT:

I became a sort of more, um, dominant person in the department and made the correct contacts and started showing that I wasn't going to be scared of anything. A lot of people actually said to me that I came there with an attitude of confidence, which was good – because immediately they could see in the entering year's class... those who were determined to work, and... actually would come to the lecturers and speak to them, and you know... I was that type of person; I always have had a strong personality... And when I came to varsity I knew varsity years was mine for the taking.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

The next extract shows a self, which, after returning from the Summer Institute in Atlanta is still quite fragile, lacking resilience, confidence and maturity. This becomes evident when Glenn starts to view his own department much more critically, in terms of their efforts towards committing to a transformational agenda:

So after that, it's sort of just because it was back into the routine of things here at UCT, it sort of just starts to go out of your mind. But then, because of things which were happening in my own department, I started looking at [issues] of transformation and I became more and more in disagreement. But I never... But there was nothing I could further, you know, sort of do to sort of think about it.

(Glenn interview, 2006)

The nature of Glenn's disagreement with his department around issues of change and transformation signals an element of resistance to the normal code of conduct that was being employed by the College of Music. It appears that he is unable to fully verbalise and rationalise his opposition to certain things which he feels goes against the grain of transformation. He finds himself at a loss for words and in a state of helplessness to change the situation, signalling that despite his first 'fateful moment', he has not yet reached a state of being able to articulate his growing awareness of himself in the world. His reaction to what he deems unfair and discriminatory practice by the College of Music is borne out of an instinctive gut feeling, an inner sense that things are not as they should be, but which he is unable to defend at this stage. Glenn's situation here bears resemblance to Margaret's, on being told by other Black students that she is not Black, but Coloured. Like Margaret, Glenn seems to resign himself to the fact that there is nothing he can do to change the department's lack of critical engagement around the issue of transformation. Like Margaret, he finds himself simply going through the routines of everyday activities, without any real investment of himself in the process. The freedom and spontaneity of Glenn's 'I' portion of self comes to be replaced by a more dominant 'me' part of self that reluctantly submits to prevailing expectations (Milliken and Schreiber 2012) of the 'they-self' (Wheeler 2013), represented by the dominant voices of authority in the music department. Glenn's submission however, is accompanied by an awareness of personal opposition and resistance. So while he partakes in the activities of the college, his feelings of discomfort are made apparent through the lack of continuity between his performance and the evolving biographical narrative of self that is developing.

The interview extract above shows that Glenn lacks the tools at this stage to deal with his feelings of disenfranchisement and self dislocation. He lacks the fortitude and 'resoluteness' to move towards and take ownership of an authentic self that is 'my own... mine... owned by me' (Wheeler 2013:np), thereby signalling the incomplete and disturbed nature of his protective cocoon at this stage. There is also a very real sense in which Glenn holds on to his first 'fateful moment' experience at the Summer Institute. He does so to protect those fragile bits of his identity that *have* undergone a transformation process, from being engulfed by the 'they-self' and the impending crisis he currently faces in his department. There is still a grappling with how to locate and engage his own sense of mission and purpose in the world. Glenn at this stage presents an ongoing struggle for self-hood (Ivanič 1998) and his reluctant participation in the daily activities at the music college is evidence of this, as is the sense of unease he feels within himself. Adler, Adler

and Fontana (1987:223) pointed out the emotional aspect of existential sociology, and the manner in which it influences agency, to the extent that individuals' who are 'affected by structural constraints' are quite capable of 'remaining mutable, changeable, and emergent'. Glenn's sense of self-identity at this stage, although incomplete, therefore still holds possibilities for changing into a more confident core self.

It is apparent that Glenn possesses transformed perspectives on the status and meaning of Black identity within historically White university settings, and certainly feels the need for this identity to be reconceptualised with the necessary support and critical institutional engagement. However, he still does not know how to participate in and effectively contribute to this process himself (which can partly be attributed to his 'fateful moment' occurring towards the end of the Atlanta Summer Institute, giving him very little time to explore appropriate forms of action to complement the new perspective and bolster the resilience of the protective cocoon). The cocoon surrounding his sense of self in the world is therefore still in the process of becoming, and is still vulnerable to the 'climate of risk' (Giddens 1991) in which it operates. Glenn, therefore, finds himself in-between spaces, moving from one phase of self-identity to another.

### **The MMUF Coordinators Conference: Discovering the tools of the trade to achieve completeness of self**

Glenn's second 'fateful moment' occurs six months after the Summer Institute and happens at the MMUF Coordinators Conference, which was held in Cape Town. The conference brings together all of the MMUF coordinators from the various higher education institutions in America (which together make up about 78 institutions), and includes the likes of Harvard, Stanford and Princeton (at this stage, UCT was the only South African institution on the programme). The coordinators meet annually, normally in New York, to discuss issues related to the mission of MMUF. The conference in Cape Town was the first and only time that it was held outside of North America. This added to the extraordinary nature of the occasion for Glenn, who was selected as a conference assistant and who was also allowed to attend most of the conference proceedings. Within the context of the MMUF Coordinators Conference, there emerged another 'liminal space' (Bowers cited in Mezirow 1991), one which makes possible the negotiation of 'new mechanisms of self-identity' (Giddens 1991:114). Within the context of this 'liminal space', Glenn undergoes the second and final part of his 'fateful moment' transformation. He sums up his experience as follows:

But then we had the January conference in the beginning of this year which was all the coordinators of the various campuses – and I attended that, I attended almost everything – and I think that's what sparked it off for me, was sitting in on seminars where you've got faculty of various universities arguing with one another about what transformation is [and why it is] necessary. And I think especially the actual topic of the conference, which was 'Excellence and Equity', which I had never come across before – and then there was this book published on that I think as well, so I had started reading the book. It just became very interesting and I thought, okay, this is actually worth looking into. I read the book... and I just thought this is for me; this is what I'm supposed to do as well! And I didn't understand the American context when I was there at Emory the year before because you kept hearing about things were not moving forward in America... And when I heard the various faculty discussing how things were going down with their own universities – that's when I realised, okay, this is actually a worthwhile course... And that's how I... definitely thought this scholarship, it's perfect that I got into it – and I so strongly believe in it, and the motivation behind this concept of moving towards change in the academy and transformation. (Glenn interview, 2006)

From this extract, the outcome of Glenn's search for a sense of fulfilment becomes visible. Through his observation of the various debates around the question of transformation taking place amongst MMUF coordinators, he begins to develop a strong sense of kinship. What he observes and experiences, feels right, and fills those spaces of uncertainty, confusion and unease that were rendering his 'protective cocoon' fragile and vulnerable to attack. As the missing pieces of his developing self begin to fall into place, so too does 'the *mantle of trust that makes possible the sustaining of a viable Umwelt*' (Giddens 1991:129). This experience allows Glenn to finally locate his own sense of 'mine-self' (Heidegger cited in Wheeler 2013) in the world. This realisation of self opens up new possibilities for him.

From this vantage point, it can be argued that his first 'fateful moment' encounter at the Atlanta Summer Institute involves a transformation of 'meaning perspectives' resulting in a 'transformed life-world' (Mezirow 1991). Through this reflective process, Glenn adopts a new perspective which enables agency on his part. Yet, it is in the process of developing this new sense of agency that he encounters challenges, so much so that it renders his initial transformation of self incomplete, since the transformation process itself can only be validated and consummated by the necessary appropriate action and moral conviction. His unsuccessful challenging of the music department's lack of transformation, which renders him helpless and silent, is a case in point. His receptiveness to the MMUF Coordinators Conference in Cape Town provides the opportunity for him to reconcile his Atlanta Summer Institute experience with his Cape Town experience. These two experiences complement each other, in that the Cape Town experience provides him with a very specific framework, a moral basis for not only thinking about, but also for enacting agency in an

empowering and meaningful way, which is something he was searching for. Evidence of his renewed commitment and investment in the issue of transformation can be seen in his reference to having read the 2005 publication of *Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education*, by Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin. The authors of this text unpack the big divide between achieving equity objectives and standards of excellence at USA higher education institutions. It is also interesting to note that one of the authors, William Bowen, was in fact the president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation from 1988 to 2006, and the MMUF Coordinators Conference in Cape Town was dedicated to his service and initiative towards establishing the MMUF programme. All of the fuss and excitement around William Bowen's contribution to transformation initiatives thus added to Glenn's experience of the Cape Town conference.

In short, an important outcome of Glenn's second 'fateful moment' is the discovery of his authentic voice. He reclaims the authority and confidence he first had when he started off at the music college, when he exhibited a cocky type of arrogance that defined who he was. The big difference however, is that the confidence he exudes emanates from a renewed and transformed sense of self and location in the world that extends beyond self-serving acts in search of public recognition. What is discernible now is the socially responsive manner in which he frames his actions and the type of effect he wants to produce. Glenn aims to assist and motivate Black music students through his teaching practice, by encouraging them to engage reflectively with how they view themselves in the world. Through such practices he helps to instil within these students, a sense of self-pride and purpose in their academic pursuits. He has taken on the added responsibility of investing in much more than his own interests, and in terms of his transformation experience, has adopted a sense of accountability for promoting and investing in the transformation process at the music college. In reflecting on how he has changed Glenn states:

I was all for excellence before... all for excellence and reputation and prestige... if equity is going to bring down your standard of excellence then you need to rethink whether it's actually going to be beneficial to stoop down to the level of equity... So that was my stance last year. Um, what changed that dramatically was I started tutoring this year as well and ... I taught a class which was predominantly White. There were a few Coloured students and we had three Black students in the class... from a... disadvantaged background... These students were not ready for the course... And they are all failing the academic coursework because they are not prepared for it... one student dropped out within the first two weeks of the first semester. When I asked him why he said he couldn't see himself passing the course at the end of the year because he couldn't understand the basic work within the first few weeks ... And I just thought this is the reality of the situation and this is a classic example of equity and excellence – so you had to weigh up the options and see, now which one is actually going to be worthwhile. And that's when I started thinking, well, of course equity at this stage is going to be the



better option because this isn't going to be a good reflection on the university if they only have 'White' students [graduating] each time and the Black students completing the degree in a much longer time or they are dropping out, and their rates of dropouts have been very high. (Glenn interview, 2006)

On his return from Atlanta, he was a third year student taking on an entire department in an effort to promote the issue of transformation, a process which nearly broke him. As a fourth year student, having undergone another 'fateful moment' experience early in January at the MMUF Coordinators Conference in Cape Town, he redirects his efforts through his tutoring, and focuses on assisting marginalised Black music students instead. So, an important outcome of his second 'fateful moment' experience was learning not only how to be an effective agent of transformation, but also where such efforts could be directed. Through a reflexive process he restores the protective cocoon's resilience, and through this act his transformation mission becomes much more focussed, much more organised and in tune with his strengths as an extrovert and a high academic achiever whose life 'is framed by music'. In his feedback on my analysis of his life in this thesis, he is also quite adamant that his transformation process within MMUF also allowed him to embrace his narcissistic tendencies as part of who he is (Personal e-mail correspondence with Glenn, February 2014). Some of these fundamental shifts are shown in the following:

I'm in my fourth and final year (at UCT) and at this stage I'm brilliant already; I can answer any questions which the first years throw at me because I was so thorough in that work. So I see them struggling with it or they will ask me and [clicks fingers] I give them the answer straight like that. Or I'd go up to the board and just start writing extensively out of my head and making things up. And then I can see – [they] like totally amazed, and, er, like 'how do you do it?' you know – 'we'd also like to be like that'. And that just makes you feel good, I mean, it reinforces that this is what I'm supposed to do and if already I'm a role model to students now, as a tutor – what's more if I am a head of department. I can explain to the students I came up through the system, exactly as you did... you should also strive... I'm good but it takes lots of hard work... and you all can achieve the same thing one day as well. And I keep telling my students also, remember that I'm in my final year – I was also in my first year at one stage feeling a bit overwhelmed in the entering year. And they all just sort of latch onto you... you know, that just gives them a bit more confidence. (Glenn interview, 2006)

He is able to incorporate the radical changes to his sense of self into the nature of his 'Being-in-the-world'. He feels grounded as a person and is comfortable with who he is. There is now a balance, a state of harmony between his 'performances' of 'normal appearances' and the construction of a coherent biographical narrative of self-identity (Giddens 1991). The trust he develops through the MMUF programme and in his teaching relationships helps keep his protective cocoon intact and enables him to reclaim the neglected 'I' portion of the self 'that



responds freely, creatively, and spontaneously' (Milliken and Schreiber 2012:690). He purposefully boasts about his mastery over the first year music curriculum, taking great pride in exaggerating the extent of his knowledge and expertise. Before, this practice would have been self-serving, conducted with the purpose of promoting the value of his individual worth and importance. Now however, he engages in this type of behaviour to dispel the perception held by many Black students entering a White middle class institution such as UCT, especially those coming from disadvantaged schooling backgrounds, that academic excellence is the reserve of an elite White minority. He advocates his own success as evidence for this, and acts as a role model for Black students in creating other possibilities of self. There is a distinct sense of morality underlining Glenn's relationships, a sense of morality which according to Giddens is made possible only through the authentic nature underlining those relationships: 'the authentic person is one who knows herself and is able to reveal that knowledge to the other, discursively and in the behavioural sphere' (Giddens 1991:186-187). The playfulness that Glenn uses to achieve this mission resembles Issachar's ability to play around with and to mobilise his Rastafarian identity after his 'fateful moment'. Like Issachar, Glenn is also able to utilise aspects of his former self without the limitations and rigidity that previously encompassed that way of being.

### Informing the fateful moment debate

Glenn's 'fateful moment' episodes occur entirely within the MMUF space. MMUF acts as a stimulus for initiating Glenn's identity transformation process and for providing him with the necessary tools with which to navigate and internalise the changes that he undergoes. Glenn's first 'fateful moment' takes the form of a profound realisation in which he acknowledges that his view of the world, and particularly his construction of Black African as inferior to Colouredness, is problematic. His first 'fateful moment' experience forces him to re-examine the rigid basis underlining his understanding of race. The nature of Glenn's 'fateful moment' is such that it allows him to see a different type of reality, one which takes cognisance of Black African people's circumstances, of their daily struggles, and of the types of societal prejudices and injustices which continue to hamper their progress and position them as 'other'. Previously, Glenn's prejudices, derived from a strong 'they-self', insulated him from the harshness of racial inequality in SA, and through his first 'fateful moment' experience this insulation is removed so as to expose him fully to the plight of Black South Africans. Glenn becomes painfully aware of his own complicity in perpetuating a system of social injustice, and it is this growing sense of awareness of Black,

particularly Black African marginalisation in SA, that helps him to recognise the humanity in others. This recognition however, leaves him in a state of isolated silence and defeat, in which he is unable to deal with the ramifications of his new self-awareness.

Glenn's second 'fateful moment' provides the tools with which to decipher, internalise and act upon the consequences of his first 'fateful moment'. His second 'fateful moment' provides an ideological basis for grounding the way he now views and participates in the world. Unlike Issachar, Margaret and Glenn's first 'fateful moments' are realisations which are profoundly debilitating, but in different ways. Margaret encounters the antagonistic policing of the boundaries of African identity in which she is the unwelcome outsider without the proper credentials to gain membership. Glenn on the other hand, encounters the harsh realities of Black African existence and adopts a sympathetic stance, an act which leaves him helpless and defeated in the face of a seemingly insurmountable adversary, namely, the music college and its reluctance to enforce transformation initiatives. So while their 'fateful moments' render them both helpless, Margaret's is borne out of anger and resentment while Glenn's takes the form of sympathy and compassion. In her second 'fateful moment' Margaret finds a sense of belonging through meaningful friendships with like-minded peers. Glenn's second 'fateful moment' locates him as part of a broader community of scholarship and activism, from which he draws strength and inspiration. Glenn's experiences show us that 'fateful moments' are sources of great tension and ambivalence about one's location and direction in the world. These moments are sobering and altruistic. They also demand specific reactions, which need to be aligned with particular ideological and emotional imperatives so as to render the cycle of the moment complete.

Glenn's 'fateful moment' episodes, therefore, lead to the creation of an authentic self that frees him from the confines of his ethnocentric view of the world. His 'fateful moments' result in a sense of authenticity that makes it possible for him to have a sense of self in the world that extends beyond the confines of his Coloured identity. His reconceptualising of what it means to be Black, adds a dimension to his 'mine-self' (Wheeler 2013) that is both liberating and empowering. He takes ownership of his Blackness, and begins to speak inclusively about a Black 'us'

I look back on the year when I started out where of the Black students in the class... with only three of us graduating on time... and I see myself as a professor. A 'Black' professor – wouldn't have termed myself as 'Black' before, but I do now. (Glenn interview, 2006)

Through his 'fateful moment' experiences, Glenn discovers that his presence is necessary and that he possesses value. Through a process of self-actualisation (Giddens 1991), he has been able to reconceptualise his sense of self and the nature of his 'embeddedness' in the world (Corrie and Milton 2000):

I started realising that – I just became more aware of humanity around me which was never part of me before. I started looking around at basically everything and looking at it as part of the humanist perspective. (Glenn interview, 2006)

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## CHAPTER NINE

### Conclusion

In the first two parts of this chapter, I offer a brief recapitulation of the core issues surrounding each of the research participants' 'fateful moment' experiences. I highlight some of the overlaps between their individual experiences and some of the more distinctive features of those experiences which have allowed for 'fateful moments' to be categorised in particular ways. In the third section, the contributions made by Travisano, Mezirow and Ivanič to the 'fateful moment' debate are summarised. The aforementioned sections are used to set up a specific platform for making a more informed evaluation of the MMUF programme. I close this chapter by offering critical insights into race and identity politics in the post-apartheid setting, in which the impacts of globalisation on the higher education sector and the transformative roles played by equity development initiatives are highlighted.

#### **Informing the fateful moment debate: Considering the lessons learnt from our case studies**

Unlike Margaret, Glenn entered the MMUF programme with a strong, superficial sense of individuality. The sense of security he gained from his protective cocoon, however, emanates from a 'they-self'. Margaret, on the other hand, entered the MMUF programme in a fragile state, not having been afforded the opportunity to have her Black status sanctioned, with the result that she lacked a sense of authenticity in the world. The argument has been made that Margaret, unlike Glenn, exhibited at least some modicum of 'mine-self' upon entering UCT, in terms of her having to defend her personal interests from quite a young age. Her black consciousness orientation is something she freely chose to adopt and internalise, as part of being located in a Coloured neighbourhood and attending Coloured schools. Upon entering university, this perception that she held of herself as being 'Black' came under severe attack. She found herself engaged in quite a drastic struggle to defend her 'Black' status, in light of the mounting pressure from her Black African peers that she is in fact, 'Coloured'. She had deeply rooted reservations about being Coloured and her grappling with the insecurities and inadequacies that this projected upon her sense of self-

worth, rendered her protective cocoon, and, by default, her as yet, under-developed sense of 'mine-self', vulnerable. This state of vulnerability led to her 'fateful moment' encounter. Like Margaret, Glenn also found that his confidence in his self-identify and how he embedded himself in the world came under increasing pressure, particularly from the perception and understanding of the term 'Black' that was unfolding at the Atlanta Summer Institute. His perception of Black as 'other', which he had used to locate himself in a position of relative privilege within the post-apartheid setting, was confronted head-on at the Institute. Through a process of critical reflexive engagement, he found himself questioning the basis of his ethnocentrism. This left him in a state of discomfort, where he was forced to confront defining aspects of his self-identity. He came to the realisation that his previous perceptions of the world were flawed, and it is his adoption of a new perspective that allowed him to recognise the need for transformation within UCT's music department. This formed the first phase of his 'fateful moment', a phase which ushered in a new way of viewing the world, but which was still incomplete in terms of active agency, advocacy and resoluteness.

Having taken on this new perspective, and having transformed his orientation to the world, Glenn was unable to go back to the way he was before he attended the Summer Institute. His 'fateful moment' experience revealed aspects of other people's presence and sense of worth in the world, people who, until then, had played no role in his life, and it is the consequences of this revelation that he had to bear. He found himself at a cross-road, and the path he chose was one in which he strove to fulfil a moral obligation to grapple with the messy and complicated issue of transformation at university. Although such actions should have allowed him to rebuild the protective cocoon housing his newly found sense of self, he was unable to complete this important step in his transformation since the impact he was trying to make on the world at that stage, was minimal. His protective cocoon was therefore in a disturbed state, rendering a sense of self which was still underdeveloped. The failure of his actions to stabilise and complete the building of his protective cocoon gave him no sense of accomplishment and left him feeling insecure and vulnerable. It was only when he attended the MMUF Coordinators Conference in Cape Town that he was able to match his newly formed perspective with a particular strategy for action. The adoption of a strategic form of action, coupled with a renewed sense of emotional security, allowed him to effectively challenge the lack of transformation he encountered. This is realised through his decision to present himself as a role model and to enter into authentic relationships with the Black students he wished to support. Through such acts, he was able to engage with the process of reforming and stabilising

his disturbed cocoon, and move towards embracing a more mature and authentic self. In this second phase of his 'fateful moment', the consolidating of the protective features of his cocoon, allowed Glenn to adopt a particular philosophical grounding for informing and embedding his new perspective. At this stage he was able to move forward again, having obtained a new lease on life. His protective cocoon was now able to reach a stage of completion, bolstered by a robust and enduring sense of mission which rendered a renewed and reinforced sense of ontological security. Glenn's newly formed cocoon was now in a secure and resilient condition, thereby allowing his maturing self to develop into a state of 'mine-self'. This new cocoon stands in stark contrast to the cocoon he had when he first entered MMUF; when he only possessed a 'they-self'.

In this way, the second phase of Glenn's 'fateful moment' bears similarities to Issachar's experience of clarity when he cut his dreadlocks and shattered the dominant influences of the 'they-self'. Before his 'fateful moment' experience, Issachar's fragile cocoon had been housing a fragmented inauthentic self desperately searching to be unified. Such unification came about through a single defining 'fateful moment' in Issachar's life and took the form of a new spiritual awakening. Through this revelation, he was able to re-establish trust and intimacy in his relationships which allowed him to rebuild his damaged cocoon and claim a sense of completeness and authenticity in the world.

In Margaret's case, her first fateful moment resulted from a vulnerable cocoon, housing an immature and naive 'mine-self' which was crushed and forced to flee in abandonment upon encountering its first real confrontation regarding its legitimacy. This confrontation left Margaret's sense of 'Being' in a state of disarray, dislocated from everyday routines. Her second 'fateful moment' offered her the opportunity to rediscover a unified sense of self by entering into meaningful relationships with other MMUF fellows. Through this investment of trust in others, she also learnt how to invest in herself, and through this process rebuilt a strong and robust protective cocoon which housed a more mature, fulfilled and robust self. The achievement of this state of authenticity helped her to reconceptualise the meaning of her Black identity in the world.

Glenn's first 'fateful moment' was unlike Issachar's or Margaret's. He did not experience euphoria or complete disillusionment. His first 'fateful moment' was a realisation and acknowledgement of his past prejudices, and an embracing of a reformed perspective about himself and others. It set in motion a process of self-actualisation that required a particular course of action to be fully realised. Like Margaret, he struggled with the consequences of his first 'fateful moment', to the point of his actions being rendered helpless and ineffective. Despite this, there was an internal resistance to a

state of helplessness that persisted; a fight against 'non-being', which made Glenn and Margaret receptive to the creation of a liminal space within the MMUF programme. This liminal space ushered in a second 'fateful moment' that rebuilt and restored the shattered cocoon, offering the possibility for accomplishing self-actualisation and for sustaining a coherent and on-going biographical narrative of self.

### **Recapping some of the core features of fateful moments**

Issachar's case illustrates how his 'fateful moment' acted as a release valve, releasing all of the insecurities and uncertainties that were preventing him from achieving an authentic sense of self. Issachar's case also illustrates the manner in which a series of varying and contradictory expressions of self manifest in a form of disconnectedness and lack of 'Being-in-the-world'. Through the adoption of a new 'informing aspect' (Travisano 1970), brought about by his 'fateful moment', Issachar is able to rise above the contradictions of his fragmented self. He is able to experience a sense of wholeness that allows him to clearly distinguish between a 'mine-self' and a 'they-self'. Issachar's spiritual awakening drew him closer to an examination of the moral dimensions of his life, where he was able to consider "how existence itself should be grasped and 'lived'" (Giddens 1991:224). His story indicates that 'fateful moments' are also solitary, once-off transformative experiences, that are complete in themselves and do not require a complementary 'fateful moment' at a later stage to reach fruition. However, it should be acknowledged that life is not static; it is dynamic and evolves in accordance with the pulse of a globalised world. As such, the sense of completeness that Issachar reached does not exclude the possibility of future 'fateful moments', in which he may find himself moving closer to an even more authentic state of being.

Margaret's case is evident of how a 'fateful moment' can induce a transitional state of detachment from the world, where one loses one's sense of self and where a state of meaninglessness pervades everyday routines. The argument has been made that Margaret's entry into the MMUF programme constituted a second 'fateful moment', which was very different from the first. Here, it might be useful to start thinking along the lines of complementary 'fateful moments'. In the lives of Margaret and Glenn, these would comprise those fateful experiences which lead to damaged and disturbed protective cocoons, rendering a self which is resentful, incomplete and without self-awareness. Operating from within this damaged cocoon, the incomplete and inauthentic self seeks a resolution to its dilemma, which only becomes realised through another transformative experience that complements and fulfils the nature of this need. The identification of these types of stand-alone and

complementary approaches to unpacking 'fateful moments', highlight the important relative and constructed dimensions underlining the existential basis of Giddens' (1991) analysis.

'Fateful moment' experiences thus offer a different way of viewing and valuing an individual's participation within climates of risk, as the precarious position of Coloured identity in SA illustrates. The consequences of 'fateful moments' are such that they add another dimension to the ways in which an individual engages with the routine nature of existence. From the perspectives of Issachar, Margaret and Glenn's MMUF experiences, this new dimension was embedded within the mantle of trust afforded by the protective cocoon, and was imbued with an acute awareness of 'mine-self' that has purpose, direction, and a meaningful sense of fulfilment.

In considering the narratives of each of the three students presented in this thesis, it appears evident that 'fateful moments' are those highly dramatic and traumatic encounters involving conflict and confrontation between an individual and the outside world, and also between disparate selves within an individual. Furthermore, these 'fateful moments' emanate from situations that produce anxiety within an individual, making them question the meaning of their life in a context where there exists multiple possibilities of being. Such levels of anxiety produce uncertainty and pressurises the protective cocoon that houses the individual's sense of self.

'Fateful moments' have also been shown to emerge out of 'liminal' states. These liminal states act as a stimulus for 'fateful moments'. Out of this emerges the possibility of rebuilding and consolidating an incomplete protective cocoon in which to house an emerging authentic self. The liminal space comprises those opportunities for building up and bolstering emotional security and resoluteness. It is through opportunities such as these that the individual can enact the agency and reflexivity needed to legitimate a state of authenticity. Exiting the liminal space with the necessary levels of emotional strength and self-determination signals the movement from a fluid, free-floating state of 'Being' towards a more anchored sense of self. The latter is achieved through re-establishing meaning and purpose in everyday routine activities. This then reinforces the ideological and ontological basis of individuals' protective cocoons and their subsequent embeddedness in the world. Individuals are left with a sense of acceptance of the knowledge that they have changed in quite a fundamental way and that they cannot go back to who they were before. Accepting the consequences of such change allows them to rewrite their biographical narratives in terms of an authentic self that anchors their past, present and future selves. The actions stemming from transformed beliefs and perspectives take on a level of significance that allows individuals' the type



of fulfilment to 'feel right' about themselves and their future trajectories in a highly complex and evolving world.

### **Travisano, Mezirow and Ivanič's contributions towards enriching Giddens' 'fateful moment' concept**

The insights drawn from Travisano, Mezirow and Ivanič have facilitated the above discussion of 'fateful moments' in a number of ways: Travisano's symbolic interactionist stance made it possible to position the research participants in relation to common symbols of reference (such as race), which each of them drew on in their representations of their selves. This allowed for a closer analysis of the racial constructs of Black, Coloured and White to be undertaken in the post-apartheid setting, and the extent to which Margaret, Glenn and Issachar grappled with defining and redefining themselves in relation to these categories. Travisano's analytical framework drew attention to the contested nature of a newly constructed identity, and the socially interactive processes of verification and validation that such an identity is exposed to before its status is legitimised. In Margaret's case, her plea to be recognised as 'Black' was rejected by her Black African peers, which forced her to redefine her Coloured status. In Issachar's case his mastery over the symbols and practices of the identities he adopted before his 'fateful moment' afforded him approval from the in-group, but he himself was unable to fully accept and legitimate his status. For Glenn, it is his immediate family that instilled a sense of Coloured pride and prejudice towards Black Africans. Travisano's approach afforded a deeper understanding of the manner in which the research participants appropriated new symbolic meanings in their transformed selves. Furthermore, his recognition of a 'main informing aspect' amongst religious converts, also allowed for attention to be directed towards identifying the core aspect which informed and sustained Margaret, Glenn and Issachar's new identities. In so far as 'fateful moments' are related to the life-changing experiences that they produce, Travisano's 'main informing aspect' offered a good basis for comparing core aspects of the research participants' identities before and after their respective 'fateful moments'. This sets in place a basis for measuring the extent of the change that took place.

Mezirow focusses on how intensely reinforced types of learning during the socialisation process can become sedimented over time so as to produce mental blocks to new types of learning. The idea of sedimentation has been useful in terms of shedding more light on the types of knowledge about the world that the research participants had constructed by the time they entered university and the MMUF programme. Glenn, Margaret and Issachar entered the university setting with specific

perspectives about how meaning in the world was structured and how they were going to use their sense of familiarity with these constructed meanings to navigate the university spaces. Drawing on Mezirow has allowed for a more thorough deconstruction of the manner in which the research participants thought about their locations in the world. Mezirow's analytical framework also made it possible to identify more clearly those perspectives that Glenn, Margaret and Issachar were trying to hold on to at the time of their 'fateful moment' encounters. In Margaret's case, it is the deeply entrenched way in which she thought about and identified with the black consciousness movement that allowed her to think of herself as Black. She was unable to reconcile herself to the fact that she was positioned as someone other than Black in the university space. This led to her state of cognitive dissonance, and it is from here that her existential crisis developed. Glenn's embedded knowledge about White superiority and Black African inferiority, and Issachar's rigid view of his parent's obstructionist role in his life, served as further examples of the sedimentation of meaning perspectives that Mezirow highlights. Mezirow's cognitive approach therefore allowed for a much clearer sense of the existentialist dimensions of 'fateful moments'. These 'fateful moments' highlighted the emotive, irrational and unconscious aspects attached to the pursuit of meaning.

Ivanič's approach of tracing change across the lifespan allowed for a distinction to be made between the various phases of the research participants' lives (as in the shift from high school into university for example), and allowed for closer attention to be paid to the nature of the boundaries which separate these different phases. Her analysis also allowed for closer consideration of the physical spaces (such as, home, school, university), which are enclosed by these boundaries, and the extent to which the norms, values and practices that operated within these spaces exerted influence over those who belonged and shared in that world, and those who were regarded as 'other'. For example, prior to Glenn's 'fateful moment', his world was structured around the view that his White heritage was something that he needed to aspire to. He used this part of his heritage to elevate his Coloured status above that of Black African, which he had been socialised to believe, was a deficit and derogatory identity. When Glenn first entered university he found that there was, in fact, a home for his prejudiced attitudes. The extent to which Glenn's home-space identity allowed him to transition into university without much trouble, created a deeper appreciation of how embedded his beliefs were at that stage. This type of orientation around Glenn's life served to foreground the extent to which the MMUF space, particularly the USA Summer Institute in Atlanta, clashed with Glenn's view of himself and others during that phase of his life. Ivanič's analytical approach towards change within a particular phase of the lifespan created a more contextually rich

basis for unpacking Glenn's 'fateful moment' episodes, and enabled deeper understanding of the trajectory of the biographical narrative that Glenn embarked upon.

Given the tight theoretical scope adopted in this thesis, only limited reference has been made to other theoretical and methodological approaches. I have not developed these in the present study but they have informed aspects of my conceptual analysis and theoretical frameworks. As such, these approaches need to be acknowledged with respect to their qualitative insights into the concepts of society, identity and self. In this sense, the contributions from social, personal and discursive psychology, which places emphasis on identity and subjectivity and the constructions thereof in micro-macro relations of power, together with its methodological contributions (e.g. discourse analyses and psychobiographical approaches), continue to inform the dynamics of race and identity transformation theory in SA. The dynamic nature of idiographic models of enquiry, such as the one adopted in this study, are therefore vitally important for securing meaningful contributions to social scientific knowledge about identity, self and the world.

### **Harnessing common purpose within the MMUF Space: Creating a safe platform for critical self-reflection in the quest for an authentic sense of 'Being' in a democratic SA**

In this section I briefly reiterate the importance of the MMUF scholarship in creating a safe space for Coloured students such as Issachar, Margaret and Glenn to explore, interrogate and consolidate the possibilities of self that become available to each of them through their MMUF experiences. The analysis of each of their 'fateful moment' episodes indicates the extent to which the MMUF programme comes to represent a liminal space. Such a space posits itself as a stimulus for self-reflection, a reference point for creating new identities, and as a measurement of personal change and transformation. Viewed against the background of the 'fateful moment' episodes unpacked here, an informed assessment of MMUF's overall 'fit-for-job' performance can now be made, in terms of its transformative mission as an equity development programme.

Issachar realised a state of self-awareness before he became an MMUF fellow, and what the MMUF context did for him was to strengthen his commitment to the plight of the working class and to reaffirm his mission for social justice. He did this through embracing a very particular type of intellectual identity, one which was critical of the types of privileges afforded by a university education within a South African context of mass under-privilege, and which was also cognisant of the extent to which such privileges can and must be used as an effective tool of social mobilisation

and transformation. His state of 'Being-in-the-world' was therefore not threatened, but rather enhanced by his MMUF experience. If anything, MMUF sharpened Issachar's critical intellectual activism edge, a pursuit which enhanced the spiritual nature of his location in the world.

When Margaret entered the MMUF programme she was given the opportunity to experience, discover and reflect on other dimensions of her sense of self; dimensions that she had kept hidden or never knew existed. Her loss of an envisaged black consciousness self was complemented by the discovery of an authentic 'Colored' self ("Colored without the 'u'") within MMUF which allowed her to reconceptualise the nature of her black consciousness identity. Through a process of critical reflection she reclaimed that part of her self-identity that *felt* real and authentic, and which gave her a sense of feeling alive and being needed in the world. This MMUF experience offered her the possibility of reinvesting in herself and in others like her, who shared the passion for being true to their nature.

Through his MMUF experience, Glenn discovered that the views he held about the world were problematic in that it prevented him from recognising the humanity in others. The MMUF space therefore opens up a more sympathetic, even empathic side to Glenn's sense of 'Being' in the world. MMUF allows him to be of service in a way that he previously could not conceive of.

The aforementioned aspect of participating in a climate of risk bears particular relevance to the MMUF programme. MMUF's focus on transformation also raises practical awareness about how to function and survive in a world of risk, such as that associated with the changing landscape of race and class in SA's higher education setting. Given the heterogeneous nature of Black student identity, MMUF becomes a site of struggle and investment. It creates conflict and tension around issues of race and identity, scarcity and privilege, and the need for transformation. It also allows students to grapple and confront these issues in a safe space, buffered from the rawness of the world. As part of a critical self-reflective process, students develop mechanisms for dealing with these conflicts through the support they receive from the MMUF space. Selwyn (the UCT MMUF student who entered into a debate with Glenn in chapter eight) captures the essence of MMUF's role when he states that his sense of comfort within MMUF stems from the fact that he knows 'where it belongs... It's something that [he] can name... can recognise' (Selwyn interview, 2007).

The local and regional MMUF support structures are complemented by the annual Summer Institutes and SSRC conferences hosted in the USA. The extent to which local MMUF sites are able

to relate and debate issues of transformation on a national and international scale is emphasised here. This embeddedness of a distinct international MMUF identity with a strong, shared sense of community, illustrates the extent to which the process of modernity has given rise to the 'globalisation of social activity' (Giddens 1991) through which the unification of identity is achieved. The various structures comprising MMUF share a common vision and enable MMUF students to move forward and to participate confidently in the world beyond the safety of MMUF. Viewed from this angle, MMUF certainly seems to be a good 'fit-for-job' in terms of its transformative mission.

### **Fateful moments and race dynamics in SA: From sites of contestation to revelations of the extraordinary - embracing a new life politics of 'Being'**

In order to identify and develop a more informed understanding of the nature of 'fateful moment' experiences amongst Coloured students attending historically White universities, and how these 'fateful moments' impact their perceptions of self, the arguments presented in this thesis have achieved a number of things, which I outline below. I offer here some concluding remarks concerning some of the core issues and themes which have emerged from my overall analysis of Coloured identity. I emphasise that there is still a need for issues of race and class to be taken seriously in educational contexts where the label of historical disadvantage tends to fragment and place limits on the realisation of self. In this sense dynamic and transformative spaces (such as that espoused by Bozalek et al. [2014]) in which opportunities for experiencing other possible ways of being in the world must be a necessary feature of an increasingly globalised higher education system. The core issues identified below are hopefully a strong step in that direction.

Firstly, my analysis shows how engrained the issues of race and class are in the biographical reconstructions of Coloured students' lives, whose minority status continues to be caught up between dominant poles of Black and White identity politics. For many Coloureds, particularly those who were engaged in the liberation struggle like Margaret's father, and recently those, like my research participants, who enter historically White higher education sectors, the call to move beyond the apartheid imposed racial categorisation of 'Coloured' has proved to be an arduous, deceptive and extremely difficult path to follow. Those classified as 'Coloured' find themselves in the precarious position of having to lay claim to some *other* identity. They have to do so in the midst of Black and White race categories whose identity markers, while having undergone varying degrees of change in South Africa's developing democracy, are still able to remain distinguishable. As such, Black and White race categories do not seem to be under as much direct pressure of having to

relocate under a new name to a new 'home'. This reveals the extent to which Coloured identity in SA remains a site of bitter contestation, even after twenty years of democratic rule. The embedded discomfort and contradictory nature of Colouredness has been shown to be a great stumbling block for harnessing a sense of individual and common purpose for the effective transformation of South African society. In short, the research participants' search for a sense of belonging in a democratic SA has sparked a critical self-reflective process that has forced them to confront the very nature of their racial existence. They have to do this within an historical landscape in which the lines between Black and White have always been clearly defined. This has forced them to relocate and reconstitute the nature of their authentic sense of 'Being-in-the-world' to enable the maintenance of a coherent and unified biographical narrative of self-identity.

Secondly, there is an emerging tendency to foreground essentialist elements within Black and White identity in the post-apartheid setting (Erasmus 2001; Zuma 2013; Bozalek et al. 2014). These essentialist elements refer to those aspects of identity that are not subject to change and which come to represent the 'true essence' of an identity. Erasmus (2001:27) argues that within the post-apartheid context 'Black essentialisms can be understood as positions which advocate one way of being black, a monolithic blackness... erasing gendered, and various other ways of being black'. Essentialisms have therefore been utilised to perform important gate-keeping functions through which the representation of Coloured as the 'other' and as different, comes to be exemplified. This implies that distinctive and rigid categories of race difference continue to be imposed. We have also seen how the onset of democracy has resulted in a conscious shift in perceptions amongst some Coloureds from having an identity imposed upon them to now taking ownership of that identity. This ownership is manifested through the reinterpretation and reinvestment in a particular type of Coloured pride, which lends itself to being utilised in an exclusive manner to reassert historical differences and to hold on to the remnants of a privileged minority status position.<sup>1</sup> With the tightening of group boundaries, we are left with a situation in which White South African identity seemingly remains largely intact, since there is little contestation amongst the research participants about what constitutes Whiteness, besides being viewed as the extreme 'other' (Erasmus 2001). This creates a context in which the onus of adaptation in the post-apartheid setting still falls mainly on Black and Coloured South Africans, thereby minimising the amount of adjustment that is

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<sup>1</sup> This resonates quite strongly with Steyn's (2005) and Steyn and Foster's (2007) analysis of 'White Talk' which illustrate some of the strategies used by White South Africans to maintain their privileged status and position in the post-apartheid setting.

necessary on the part of their White peers (Steyn and Foster 2007).<sup>2</sup> This makes it exceedingly difficult for those who wish to move beyond these racial constraints to explore other possibilities of being. The bounded nature of these racial constraints not only makes it difficult for insiders to move out, it also makes it difficult for outsiders to move in! As such, when viewed through the lens of group awareness (as in race, class, gender and religious groups), my analysis of various 'fateful moment' episodes reveals some of the challenges that the research participants face in trying to move beyond their group identities to obtain a legitimate and authentic sense of self. Caught up in this process of trying to negotiate access to new identities, they often end up in 'liminal' spaces, and it is within these extraordinary spaces that opportunities arise to overcome feelings of loss of self. This 'liminal' state renders them vulnerable in their engagements with reality, and it is here that transformations of self-identity are manifested through active forms of agency.

The type of analysis presented here indicates that drastic and enduring transformations of self-identity in a democratic SA are likely to occur beyond the essentialist boundaries of group identities. Through the formation of these new identities, other avenues for negotiating a sense of belonging and purpose in and also beyond historically White South African educational institutions will emerge. Issachar's adoption of a spiritual quest, although borne out of the need to overcome the contradictions of being Coloured and privileged, is a move in that direction.

Thirdly, there has been a fundamental shift in thinking beyond the confines of dominant racial constructs. This is shown by my research participants' adoption of a new type of 'Black' identity. Their identification with Blackness stems from a particular type of philosophical consciousness and self-awareness of the need to be actively engaged in the struggle for the realisation of one's purpose in life. Here Black identity comes to be viewed not in terms of skin colour or ethnicity, but in terms of how one *feels* about oneself in the world. It represents a means with which to acknowledge and reflect on the spirit of the struggle against the injustices of South Africa's racist past, so that a new path of personal growth and connectedness to the world can be chartered. This thesis has shown that Coloured students' reflections on the drastic changes that they have undergone is also a signal that Blackness represents a form of critical engagement with social symbols, attitudes, structures and actions that continue to ostracise and silence the presence of other possibilities of being. What these students' 'fateful moments' expose is the fallibility and unfeasibility of the socially constructed and divisive nature of racial categories in the new

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<sup>2</sup> Erasmus (2001) has viewed this as part of the essentialist features of Whiteness which contribute towards rigidly reinforcing race-group relations, as has been shown by Steyn and Foster's (2007) review of recent studies in this area.

democratic SA. At the same time the use of the term 'Black', despite its reconfiguration, is also a clear indication of the resolute nature of racial descriptors. These descriptors continue to be used as a default strategy to compensate for the absence of a new language that will allow us to envision the possibility of a future beyond race. The research participants certainly resort to this default mode as they struggle to convey their new sense of self-identity beyond the traditional bounds of Colouredness. Their 'fateful moment' experiences have pushed them into a space where the language needed to speak about life beyond race is not yet fully developed. They now find themselves confronted with the challenging task involving the 'unlearning' and 'unmaking' of race (Erasmus 2008). They therefore experience this space as new, unfamiliar and risky territory, but at the same time this space also holds much possibility and excitement in store as they journey to fulfil their destinies. This dynamic context demands that the autobiographical narratives of self-identity be 'reflexively sustained' to achieve coherence as it negotiates the dialectic relationship between the 'local' and the 'global' (Giddens 1991). Through a reflexive process the research participants have therefore reached a stage where their adoption of a 'Black' identity constitutes a new way of 'Being-in' a crisis-ridden and ambivalent world. In this way Margaret's decision to adopt the label of "Colored without the 'u'" indicates the extent to which she has come to internalise an identity which is more cosmopolitan in nature, one which is not limited and confined to the local South African context. As such, she fully embraces her identity as an 'international student' (personal e-mail correspondence with Margaret, Feb. 2014). This signal that through the discovery of an 'authentic self', each of the research participants are able to think, feel and act in a way which says, 'I *am* necessary'.

Fourthly, the role played by equity development programmes such as MMUF at institutions like UCT, needs to be acknowledged. The establishing and consolidating of a common mission and world view across local, regional and international MMUF programmes has intensified and even normalised the transformation agenda. In this respect MMUF, as a liminal space, is also a product of late modernity. Incorporated as one of UCT's equity development initiatives, MMUF has been geared towards promoting change within the lives of the UCT-MMUF students, and is now also feeding back to promote fundamental change within UCT itself. On the part of the research participants here, the challenge of disowning an identity they had known all their lives formed a necessary part of grappling with the process of transformation in their pursuits of personal growth and development. In this respect MMUF's drive to transform the traditional stronghold of historically White universities through the promotion and recognition of Black and minority



intellectual capacity, has acted as a stimulus for critical reflective engagement for the MMUF students and UCT as a whole.

In this respect MMUF, as an equity initiative, has distinguished itself in terms of increasing the number of Black intellectuals within academia. On the local front UCT-MMUF boasts a total of eleven PhD's by the end of the 2014 academic year with nine PhD's in progress (UCT MMUF Programme Annual Report, 2014). UCT-MMUF therefore not only produces PhD's, it produces a very particular type of Black PhD graduate; one who engages in 'life politics' and who takes seriously the responsibility of promoting social change; and one who advocates for creating a certain type of teaching and learning space in which other possibilities of self can be realised within the academy. From this perspective the UCT students' local, regional and international involvement in the MMUF programme can be viewed as a symptom of the 'globalisation of social activity' (Giddens 1991) process alluded to above.

The 'fateful moment' experiences of these research participants also allow for more critical debate about the impact of late modernity in a South African context which seeks to move beyond the confines of its apartheid past. Such impacts are discerned by the manner in which the MMUF research participants have been able to question, doubt, discard, reimagine and recontextualise their racial identities, thereby accentuating Giddens' 'unification versus fragmentation' and 'powerlessness versus appropriation' dilemmas. Further impacts of late modernity are also evident in child-rearing practices, in which the dilemma of 'authority versus uncertainty' takes on an array of features within and outside of the home. In Margaret's case, she grows up without much guidance from her parents in terms of what to think and do (e.g. in terms of religious affiliation and cultural pursuits), while Glenn's strict Christian upbringing, his interest in music and the pride and admiration he has in his European heritage, is strongly influenced by the two authoritative figures in his life, namely his mother and grandmother. In Issachar's case, he generally rejects his parents' efforts and rebels on all fronts. Instead he seeks guidance and acceptance elsewhere within the very structured socio-political and religious environments of Alkemy and Islam, which require submission to the authority of male figures.

On yet another level, the impact of late modernity on a South African landscape that is emerging after apartheid, can also be unpacked through the globalising influences of capitalistic enterprise as it continues to create a variety of markets and consumption choices. In this context an individual's growing sense of self-awareness comes to be associated with a desire for consuming certain goods

and styles of life. This indicates a commodification of self-actualisation (Giddens 1991). Of course, a crucial outcome of capitalism, with its focus on individual freedom and choice, is that it does generate major material inequalities on a global scale (Giddens 1991). As one of the most unequal societies in the world, the Black African majority in SA still find themselves at the bottom of the economic chain, being defined by their marginalised working class and cultural status. Achieving success in this market orientated system means having obtained a certain level of socio-economic status, which allows for the adoption of particular types of lifestyles deemed by market forces as worthy of emulation (Giddens 1991). Such lifestyle choices are displayed visibly so as to allow certain individuals to distinguish themselves from others. It is this issue of socio-economic class status and the extent to which it came to signify a particular public representation of self, that Issachar was immensely aware and ashamed of. The assigning of value to individuals', based on their class status, creates a moral dilemma for Issachar and it is these conflicted feelings which he struggles to reconcile within himself. Issachar's reflexivity is viewed here as a site of necessary resistance against 'commodified influences' in the pursuit of 'developing a coherent self-identity'. Glenn, on the other hand, used such class distinctions to elevate and distinguish his status as a particular type of Coloured who consumes a sophisticated lifestyle. Through the latter he hoped to present a sense of self which is refined and which bears a strong resemblance to European ancestral pursuits in terms of cultural and intellectual proclivity. In Glenn's case, strong 'narcissistic traits' (Giddens 1991) came to the fore, in which he stereotyped Blackness and Black African culture as an inferior working class commodity. Margaret's interest in the arts also allowed her to distinguish herself from other Coloureds on an individualistic and intellectual basis. All three students therefore grappled in very different ways with the social and economic privileges at their disposal and with the extent to which their access and consumption of such privileges impact on the project of the self and the nature of their Coloured identities. This casts the spotlight on Giddens' fourth dilemma; the 'personalised versus commodified experience'. The lifestyle choices which these three students had access to become significant for understanding the ways in which the reflexive project of the self is undertaken and the extent of transformation that this self undergoes when confronted with questions relating to the existential nature of being.

Of significance here is the extent to which all of these dilemmas have become increasingly visible in the movement away from a conventional modern world. Through foregrounding these dilemmas in the South African context, one is better able to conceptualise how these dilemmas are being dealt with and how in doing so, the possibility of an authentic 'mine-self' is allowed to come into being.

As stated earlier, this study's research participants' realisation of a growing sense of self authenticity made it possible for them to actively engage in a 'life politics... a politics of self-actualisation in a reflexively ordered environment, where that reflexivity links self and body to systems of global scope' (Giddens 1991:214).

In summary, using Giddens' (1991) dilemmas to unpack the nature of the identity transformation experiences of Coloured UCT students, serves to highlight the various levels of discomfort accompanying the manner in which drastic change is internalised, negotiated and expressed in the public sphere. A 'fateful moment' experience also alerts one to the importance of contextualising meaning, of acknowledging the social structures and forces at play in the formation of selves, and of recognising adaptive abilities and creative possibilities for enacting change. This forms part of the dynamics of being culturally and socially situated. As Black students increase in numbers at institutions of higher education in SA, the ability to adapt and to achieve recognition and equal status in settings where White dominance is the norm continues to be a challenge (see Leibowitz et al.'s [2012] edited volume which raises concerns about the challenges facing higher education in SA). By tapping into the experiences of Black students who have successfully negotiated the shifts in self-identity that accompany the transition into university, we can make an important contribution towards creating a nurturing and receptive learning environment.<sup>3</sup> In this context equity development programmes such as MMUF will continue to be a vital mechanism for articulating the complexities of change in higher education contexts.

### **Possibilities for future research**

In-depth qualitative case-study research of this nature often exposes other avenues of enquiry that would add further understanding to existing analyses. Within the context of the research presented here, I have identified two particular areas of interest which have fallen outside the scope of the present study. These areas need to be taken up for further examination so as to build upon existing findings in this thesis.

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<sup>3</sup> The First Year Experience (FYE) project, initiated at UCT recently, is thus a step in the right direction, but is a much broader and general approach to student development than the position occupied in this thesis. FYE is geared towards improving student experiences at the first-year level by 'strengthening pre-admissions support and first-year careers advice; providing a welcoming and supportive university-environment for prospective and new students in all faculties; promoting a renewed focus on first-year teaching; promoting an integrated approach to student development, linking initiatives that respond to students' academic, affective, social and material needs' (Advert for post of FYE Project Director, UCT website). See [https://www.uct.ac.za/students/orientation/first\\_year\\_students/](https://www.uct.ac.za/students/orientation/first_year_students/) for more insight.

The first area of interest concerns the concept of liminality. The issue of liminality was only very briefly addressed in this thesis, and was limited to Bowers' (cited in Mezirow 1991) definition of the term and Kates' (2010) analysis related to the transformation of the 'other' in the *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*. The comparison of such analysis to Margaret's experience at the USA MMUF Summer Institute, offers a glimpse into the workings of liminality and the ways in which this concept can shed light on the process of identity transformation. At the same time it provides scope for a much deeper exploration of the liminal dimensions of the MMUF space to be undertaken. This would allow for a more nuanced and insightful understanding of how the location of MMUF within the historically white university setting, could effectively be used as a mechanism for reflecting on the dynamics of change and transformation at both a structural and personal level.

Viewing MMUF as a liminal space will provide additional theoretical and analytical frameworks for unpacking Giddens (1991) fateful moment and protective cocoon concepts. The adaptation of Victor Turner's (1974) work on liminality by a number of scholars (see for example Said 1994; Thomassen 2009; and Beech 2011) has shown how versatile the concept of liminality is for theorising about identities in transition and for shedding light on the manner in which social structures affect the nature of identity transformations. The MMUF equity development space at UCT (and also the MMUF spaces at other South African institutions such as UWC and WITS) would certainly benefit from such an analysis in the near future.

The second area of interest which would be worth pursuing, and which would certainly address issues related to generalisability, concerns the possibility of doing a comparative study of MMUF programmes across South African universities. The University of the Western Cape (UWC), as a historically Coloured university, would be an ideal site for this type of comparative investigation. An analysis of Coloured student identities within the MMUF programme at UWC would allow for an examination of how its location at a historically Coloured university compares with MMUF at UCT, a historically White university. It would be interesting to gauge how perceptions of self, given that Coloured students make up the majority of UWC's student body (47% in relation to 5% Whites, as per UWC's Annual Report, 2012), compare across the two institutions. These findings would be quite important as local MMUF programmes at South African universities (UCT, UWC and WITS) are currently beginning to develop very specific individual regional MMUF identities, while still contributing to the development of a collective national MMUF identity.



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




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## Appendix A

### Map of Cape Town, UCT and surrounding suburbs.

-  UCT
-  Issachar and Glenn's neighbourhood: Coloured – 88% Black African – 6% White – 0.3%
-  The suburb (62.3% White) in which Pinelands High – a model C School – is located.
-  Margaret's neighbourhood: Coloured – 88% Black African – 7.7% White – 0.3%
-  Popular Coloured suburbs on the Cape Flats: average of 79% Coloured per suburb

A few  
upmarket  
suburbs around  
UCT

#### Average racial breakdown in these upmarket suburbs as at 2011:

- \* White – 70%
- \* Black African – 13.6 %
- \* Coloured - 7.9%

(<https://en.wikipedia.org>)



<http://www.staycentred.co.za/images/capephotos/map1.j>